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ELVIRA,
LADY
CASTERTON

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ELVIRA, LADY CASTERTON

A Novel.

BY

M. S. SCHWARTZ.

TRANSLATED FROM THE SWEDISH

BY

ANNIE WOOD.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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ELVIRA, LADY CASTERTON.

CHAPTER I.

THE next day Armida was ill, and unable to attend the festivities still going on in honour of the newly-married pair. For days she lay in bed weak and feverish, not caring to exert herself even to think; her strength seemed gone, and she took no interest in anything. The man for whose love and affection she yearned with her whole soul, had in open words expressed his contempt for her, and was now gone away into a far-off country, likely never

to return. As far as was in her nature to care for any one, she loved this man—she had schemed and plotted for years in the hope that some day she would be rewarded, and he would turn to her to give him the affection denied him from the two he had held dear to him. She had been very patient; she had waited and waited, hearing all his grief, listening to his passion for Elvira, and his admiration for Martha, receiving only cold friendliness for herself, and yet always working for him.

And this was the end! Contempt and hard bitter words from the man she would have sold her soul to win a smile from. No wonder she felt life was not worth living for, and that if she could die she would not regret anything she had now in her possession.

She was only ten days in her room, but when she left it she was ten years older in feeling and appearance. She had gone through a crisis. The illusion she had lived in, which, although self-created, had been the moving joy and hope of her life, was now, when she least expected it, suddenly snatched from her vision, and in its stead only a hopeless void and black despair stretched before her.

She had been downstairs, and was about again only a few days, when one morning a visitor was announced waiting for her in the drawing-room. She went in, wondering who it could be, and was not a little surprised to see Captain Ström.

He came towards her, and said a few kind words. He noticed the drawn, haggard expression on her face, and the thinness of her hands, but he said nothing to

her about it. He spoke of his wife—asked why she had not been to Skoggard since their wedding day—how sorry Martha was she had not seen her, and that they must be very good friends, &c., but all in a series of rapid questions without giving her time to answer, or say a word for herself.

Then, as he sat down, he said,

"The real reason I am here to-day is Lady Casterton—I want to know something about her, and as I am told you are her most intimate friend, I naturally turn to you to give me the information I seek."

"That depends upon what it is, captain," she answered, quickly, for Elvira's name had agitated her.

"It is about her last journey from here."

"Then you may command me."

"Do you know if there was any scene

between her and her husband which may have induced him suddenly to leave the Château?"

"I hardly think so," she answered, quietly, but with changing colour.

"Then try and think," he replied, fixing his eyes sternly on her. "I know that the day before Casterton left he went to Skoggard, in consequence of a letter my wife wrote to him, and which you yourself handed to him."

"If you know that why ask me about it?" she answered, not daring to look at him.

"Will you try and understand me?" he went on, decidedly. "My wish is to find out if there was any uncomfortable scene between Casterton and his wife after that visit, and I shall think you kind if you will tell me."

Armida shrunk from his fixed stare as she answered:

"All I can say is that I met Lord Casterton returning from Skoggard: he asked me if I had seen his wife, and I told him she had driven down to Altorp. He turned the horses round immediately in that direction, and drove off. The next morning, when I was up, I heard he had left the Château."

"So he drove to Altorp, and it was *you* who suggested it," remarked the captain, slowly. A moment or so after he added, "Thank you for what you have said—it is valuable information."

In spite of her sorrow and want of spirits Armida could not resist the temptation to find out what this questioning betokened; so she said:

"I had no idea you took such an interest

in Lady Casterton. I thought you hardly knew her."

"It is easy to be mistaken on such matters," he replied, carelessly. "I flatter myself I know her very well, and I can assure you that very rarely in life have I taken such an interest in any one as I do in her. Perhaps you will kindly tell me, also, how long after her husband left she remained?"

"Only one day. She and Mrs. Brow left the day after. She was good enough to beg me to remain here, and do as I would in my own home."

"Have you heard from her since she went away?"

"Not from her—but Mrs. Brow wrote to me, saying that they were going to the south of Europe, so we need not be anxious if we did not hear again for a very long time."

The captain rose to go, but just as he was saying good-bye, Armida said,

"Lotta, Lady Casterton's old nurse, had a letter direct from her mistress. The news was the same as mine from Mrs. Brow, but perhaps you would like to see Lotta, and ask her yourself?" And she in her turn fixed her eyes upon the man before her, to see what effect the name would have upon him.

"Lotta, Lotta, who is she?" he said, indifferently, as if hearing the name for the first time.

"She brought up Elvira. Shall I call her?"

"Thank you."

Armida rang, and asked that Lotta should be sent for.

The captain turned, and looked out of window—perhaps to hide the ironical smile

that had crept around his mouth. When Lotta entered he moved suddenly round and faced her—but, to Armida's disappointment, she saw no surprise or effect of any kind on the face of the waiting woman.

She explained to her that the captain was anxious to hear the latest news of Lady Casterton, and begged her to tell him all she knew.

But Lotta knew no more than Armida. Her mistress had written to say she was going South, and that no one was to be uneasy if a letter did not come from her for any length of time. She meant to travel for a long period, and the letter was dated from London.

Lotta curtsied, and went, and soon after, the captain, again begging Armida not to forget his wife, but to come and see her

directly she felt strong enough, shook hands, and mounted his horse.

A few days passed, and then Armida made up her mind to pay Martha a visit, and see if she could find out the reason for this ill-assorted marriage.

She hoped to find Martha alone, but she was disappointed.

The captain met her at the door, conducted her himself to his wife and remained by her side during the whole visit.

She drove home without having discovered one single clue by which to satisfy her curiosity.

She had not seen Martha for a long time previous to her wedding day. During her short engagement she had been with her father in Denmark, and it was not till the banns were published that she arrived at

Skoggard. So Armida had had no opportunity of observing her manner to her betrothed husband, or of finding out if she took the slightest interest in him.

Certainly she did not love him.

But what could have induced her to tie herself to this strange man without youth or name or fortune? She was not without admirers who would have given her a coronet and an establishment worthy of a princess, if she would only have deigned to accept such advantages. She loved Casterton, Armida knew very well; why then give herself to this unknown man whom in London she appeared to hate and fear, and whose very presence Armida had noticed banished her colour and took the light from her eyes?

Armida was determined to spare no pains to find this secret out, and although

her own heart was bleeding from the shattering of her dearest hope, she yet set to work to probe Martha's, and lay bare the sorrow which had evidently driven her to this step.

For this purpose she went again and again to Skoggard, but the captain was always by the side of his wife, saying amiable nothings to both ladies, amusing them, showing them his paintings or reading to them, but never leaving them alone for one single minute, and never allowing Armida the remotest chance of a private chat with Martha.

CHAPTER II.

ONE morning towards the end of October Armida drove down to Skoggard.

As the carriage stopped at the gate, an old servant of the family came forward to open the door, and said,

"Madame Ström is not well to-day."

"*Madame* Ström!" exclaimed Armida, astonished, "why not countess?"*

"Because the captain has forbidden us

* In Sweden, if a noble lady marries a man without title, it is optional if she retains her own title or not.—*Translator's Note.*

to call her by her title, and he is master here. The count seems afraid of him. Never did I think that any one but Fröken Martha would have to be obeyed here. It is a sad change, but this captain has all the power now."

"How do you like him for a master?"

"Oh, well enough; he is severe, but then you see he is not a nobleman, and hasn't the manners of the old families."

"Is he at home?"

"No, he rode to Altorp an hour ago."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Ask if I can see your mistress."

And as she slowly walked to the little room where Martha was sitting, she rejoiced that at last the moment had come when she could undisturbed accuse her of her treachery to Carl, and at the same

time insinuate her husband's strong interest in Elvira.

But she had hardly entered the room when the captain sprang up the stairs after her, and quickly opening the door said:

"How good you are to come. Martha is not well, and will be delighted for you to stay with her till evening."

"I cannot to-day, I think," began Armida.

"But you must," he interrupted. "I will drive you home myself, so I shall send back your horses. May I?"

She said yes, hoping that in the course of a long afternoon circumstances would favour her with a few moments' chat alone with her hostess.

Presently he left the room and the two ladies were alone.

"Martha," said Armida quickly, "why were you so false as to tell Carl—that—"

The door opened and in came the captain.

"You will be far more comfortable in the tower-room. The sun is there, and it is warm and bright. Won't you come, darling?" he asked, turning to Martha.

"If you like," she replied, rising up.

And they all went.

The "tower-room," as it was called, had once been the library, but was now changed into a kind of studio. There was a piano in one corner, a writing-table in another, and in the middle of the apartment stood a large easel. Pictures and statuettes were scattered about; there was no carpet, but various reclining chairs and odd-shaped stools filled the room.

One of these the captain dragged to

the window and put his wife playfully into it; he did the same to Armida, and then drawing up a stool for himself he sat between them and talked to then till dinner time.

After dinner he persuaded them to return to his den, as he termed the tower room, and he would try and find something to amuse them.

He opened his portfolios and showed them his sketches; he drew caricatures of people they knew so quickly and so absurdly true that even Martha laughed as if she enjoyed the fun.

Then he drew out several portraits of Martha, and told Armida how he longed to paint a full-length figure of his wife, but that the days were so short in the north he should not be able to accomplish it till the spring.

Sketch after sketch he took out of his portfolio and handed them to Armida. At last he uncovered one, and regarding it with a soft expression stealing into his face, he said after a pause,

"Of all the work I have done this is the dearest to me. Nothing I regret more than not having a finished painting of this charming head. I made this sketch one evening at the opera, when I was lucky enough to have a box vis-à-vis to the original."

He held it before Armida, adding,

"Have you ever seen a more fascinating countenance? Look at the sweet expression, the beautiful oval of the face, and the soft gazelle-like eyes. Ah, that is the woman who is born to send men mad and worry poor artists to death. I shall never

forget the impression she made on me the first time I saw her."

Armida looked and saw—Elvira, and she half started as the face came near her. Martha stooped her head over the other pictures.

"What a cruel stony heart the individual must have who would willingly bring sorrow and trouble into that angelic face," continued the captain, "and cause tears to flow from eyes that beam with so much kindness and goodness. To see her and not to love her one must be indeed cold-hearted, but to live with her and wound and pain her, then such an one would be a demon. Don't you think so, Fröken Kayhjelm ?"

He put back the sketch in his portfolio, but Armida did not answer; his question had moved her too much.

"Apropos of Lady Casterton," said the captain breaking the silence which had fallen between them, "Herr Brogren has gone to Constantinople."

"That is a very strange propos of yours," said Martha; "one would judge there must be some connection between Lady Casterton and M. Brogren."

"Well, there is always a connection between a woman and the man she rejects," he answered. "You know, my dear, as well as Fröken Armida, that she shrunk from Brogren's admiration. It was that open unabashed affection of his which led up to the duel between him and Sir Sidney. He has been punished, and I hope all Elvira's enemies will meet a similar fate."

Fortunately for Armida's dignity the count, who had been sitting for the

last hour reading the paper, suddenly said,

"Shall I read you a portion of a letter describing a scene on the battle-field in the Crimea?"

"If it will interest the ladies, do certainly," said the captain eyeing Armida's pale face and perturbed air, and throwing himself back on a couch to listen at his ease.

The count read:

"Most of our readers know that many noble-minded women, ladies of birth and position, both English and French, have followed the troops here, and act as nurses to the wounded. The English ladies have hitherto acted most self-denyingly. They have left home and comfort, smiling faces and every luxury in order to take upon

themselves the onerous duty of comforter to the sick and wounded, and to nurse and tend the helpless soldiers. Amongst this noble band of self-devoted sisters was a Lady Casterton——"

His three listeners uttered exclamations of surprise.

The captain sprang up and hastened to his father-in-law's side. His face was blanched and his forehead damp with perspiration as he looked over the shoulder of the count who read on.

"Without thinking of or heeding the danger around her, she moved in the thickest of the battle, consoling the dying and binding up the wounds of the fallen men. The fighting was over, the Russians were retiring, when one of the last shots struck

her between the shoulders as she was stooping over a wounded man."

A sigh, so deep that it seemed as if life itself were giving way, burst from the captain's breast. He seized the back of the chair for support, and was evidently suffering acutely from the shock he had just had. Before his wife had time to speak to him or recover from the agitation the sudden news had given her, a servant entered the room with a letter in his hand.

"A messenger brought this from Stockholm. It is urgent, and from the French minister, captain."

But he took no notice, only stared at the servant as if he heard nothing. The count touched his arm, saying—

"You look ill, Ström; what is the matter?"

He did not answer, but slowly stepped to the man and took the letter.

"Is there to be an answer?" he asked.

"No; it came by special messenger. He waits below, but says he has no orders for a reply."

"Good. Give him some drink-money."

He sat down on the couch again and opened his dispatch. His brow cleared slightly as he read the few lines it contained, and when he had finished he gave again a deep sigh, and put his head in his hands.

He was silent a long time, and when at last he raised his eyes and looked at his wife, he saw her head was resting on the cushion, and she seemed to be weeping.

He rose and went to her.

"Martha," he said sadly, "why do you cry? Are *you* sorry Elvira is dead?"

"Yes," she answered, looking up at him, whilst it seemed as if some softer feelings were forcing themselves into her face and expression.

He looked at her half tenderly, half proudly, for a moment, then he turned to Armida and said coldly—

"The coachman must drive you home to-night. I must beg you to excuse me, Fröken."

And without another word he left the room.

At last she was alone with Martha, and could talk unreservedly; but at that moment even she could think of nothing but the sad and sudden death of the young and beautiful Elvira Casterton.

She sat still without opening her lips, and then half an hour after quietly rose, silently kissed Martha, and went away.

CHAPTER III.

HOWEVER wicked a man's heart may be, there are moments in his life when his better nature resumes its sway and insists upon being heard, if only in the recesses of his conscience.

So it was with Armida. She could not sleep at all that night; it seemed to her as if some one were calling to her and saying that she was the cause of Elvira's early death, and that she by her intrigues and underhand plottings had driven the unhappy woman into the dangers of the war.

Whichever way she turned in her bed, if she opened her eyes or shut them, she saw Elvira's sorrowful face near her, asking, "Why did you work me so much harm?" And what had she herself gained by all the wilful mischief she had wrought? Only contempt and aversion from the man the only being in the world she loved.

The morning dawned at last, but gray and clouded, and as dark for the earth's day as her night had just been. Worn out and spiritless she rose and dressed, and was going from her room to breakfast, when the door was flung wide open and Lotta's scared face appeared before her.

"Fröken! Fröken!" exclaimed the poor woman, "what is this here in the paper? Look—can—can it—no, no—it can't be true—it is fearful! Read it—see—look!"

She handed Armida a paper, and casting

herself on the bed, groaned aloud in her agony.

Armida looked at the part she had pointed to, and saw, with its deep black edge, the little square corner, announcing Elvira's death. She sighed as she read it, and glanced uneasily at the weeping woman on the bed.

For a few moments Lotta sobbed aloud; then, starting up, she cried out:

"Oh! say it is not true—that the paper is wrong, or I shall go mad; she die before me—my darling, my foster-child!"

And again she sunk down overcome with her grief.

Armida tried to comfort her, but it was of no use. Her sobs grew louder and stronger, till at last she had a violent fit of hysterics, which frightened Armida. She had the suffering woman carried to her

room, and the doctor was sent for to come at once.

But before the doctor arrived another visitor was announced asking for Lotta.

It was Pastor Fredrik Brogren.

He was taken to Lotta's room, and he had not been there a quarter-of-an-hour before Lotta grew quiet and calm, and able to talk coherently of her mistress's sad death.

Pastor Brogren had accomplished the task Armida had failed in. He spoke kindly and gently to the agitated woman, comforted her with warm sympathy, and a patient, kind-hearted manner, and gradually soothed her till the sobs ceased, and tears of relief poured from her eyes.

Presently he motioned Armida to leave the room; and when he was alone with the broken-hearted, suffering serving-woman,

he encouraged her to tell him the long pent-up troubles that she had borne for so many years. It is not for us to partake in the secrecy of this interview—enough that when it was all confessed, Lotta said at last with the tears streaming down her cheeks,

"I know now I sinned in not telling Elvira everything concerning herself before she married. The evening before she went away to that dreadful Crimea she came to me, and begged me to tell her all I could about her mother, but I would not—and then I felt that I had done a great wickedness in letting her go without knowing the truth. Shall I ever forget her face as she said to me just before she left me,

"'Lotta, your affection has been a mistaken one, and it has done me much harm.

CHAPTER IV.

HEN Armida left Skoggard the evening before, Martha and her father remained alone in the tower chamber.

"Martha," said the count, breaking the long silence which had followed Armida's departure, "*she* is dead. Fate has freed us from her."

"Freed us!" she exclaimed, in a low tone, as she went over to her father, and laid one arm caressingly on his shoulder. "Say rather," she added, sighing, "that we sent her to her death." She passed her hand

over her forehead, and went on slowly: "I wish I had never hated her—never done anything to give her pain."

"What!" uttered the count, putting his arm round her waist—"What! you, Martha, speak in that whimpering tone! Have you changed your character? Remember that that Elvira, as long as she lived, was a dangerous enemy for us. Her death is the one thing that ought to rejoice us, even if it cannot give you your heart's desire, as you are now married to this man, who—"

He hesitated, and stooped to pick up the fallen papers.

"Has an iron will, and has chosen to make himself Elvira's avenger," she added for him. "You and I, papa, are his bond-slaves, and nothing more," and a bitter smile swept over her beautiful face.

The count murmured between his teeth,

"I hope yet to live till the day when I shall tread on the grass over his grave—as long as he is alive there is no peace for us. But don't speak of him, Martha—speak of yourself."

"And what of me?" she answered.

"Nothing! nothing!"

She leant her head against her father, as she continued,

"I read once of two criminals who loved each other so well and ardently that when one of them was taken to his death, the other instantly murdered his jailor in order to die the same death as his friend—and I thought, as I read that story—of you and me. We have both done that which would not bear investigation, and which takes away all respect for each other; and yet how tenderly we love each other. Some

say where there is no esteem there can be no love. For you, papa, I have never had any esteem; you have always appeared to me to act most contemptibly—and yet I love you so truly that to save you from disgrace I contracted this hateful marriage, which is fast making me a sickly, miserable, wretched woman, full of fear and horror of the future. The man by whose side I am bound obliges me to do his will in all things; he seems to me to be a hard avenger of my sins. He has dragged from me all power and energy, and now I feel like an entrapped lioness. Each time I move a step I am conscious of the cage around me, and I feel my strength fast failing me. And this is why, although I pity you, I tell you how fondly I love you; and yet—I wish I did not—for when you

read out an hour ago, of *her death,* I longed to spring forwards and cry out, 'Why did you teach me to hate that woman?' but instead I burst into a flood of tears."

She raised her head, and added sadly, and with a ring of regret in her voice,

"Is it really I, the fearless Martha, who weeps over an enemy's death? What has that man not brought me to!"

The count stared at his child.

"Really, Martha, I can hardly recognize you. You, beautiful and talented as you are, to let yourself be crushed by the man you hate! Allowing you were forced to marry him, there is no need now to be his slave. From the moment he united his fate to yours, it was his duty to shield and keep you from all discovery, but not to vent his wrath *on you.*"

"Martha, I have waited for you a long time," cried a voice at the door.

She turned, and saw her husband. For a moment, she looked at his drawn white face as if she did not understand his words —but an instant after she took her father's hand, pressed it in both hers, and said, "Good-night, papa!" then quietly went towards her husband, who was staring angrily at her father with his large dark eyes.

"Go to your room, Martha," he said; "I must speak to your father."

But she stood still.

"Whatever you have to say to papa I mean to hear. I shall not leave this room till you go with me."

The captain opened his eyes, as if this opposition astonished him.

"Martha," he said, quietly, "*I* wish you to go. What I have now to say to your

father it is best no one else should hear. Go, then; I shall come soon. You are far too wise a woman to oblige me to put you out of the room."

She glanced first at her father, then at her husband, and left the room. The captain shut the door and locked it, as if to make sure against intruders; and then turning round, faced the count, who was leaning against his chair, frightened and fearful of what was to follow.

The tall, muscular, strongly-built captain stood looking for several seconds at his crouching, fear-stricken father-in-law, ere he said, in a voice he vainly endeavoured to render calm,

"Count Stangenskjöld, you must remember to keep to yourself *why* I married your daughter, for if you do not, and permit yourself to talk to her as you were doing

when I entered the room just now, then you run the risk of my forgetting the relationship between us, and publishing to the world what a wretch you are. Take care of your words, then, if you have any affection for yourself. Utter one syllable against Lady Casterton, and I will then and there cry aloud who she is, and *why* you taught your own daughter to hate her."

The count turned ashy pale. He had no moral courage, and dared not reply to his proud son-in-law.

The captain took a turn up and down the room, to keep his anger in check. When next he halted in front of the little trembling man, he said,

"To-morrow I leave this on a long journey. You and my wife will remain; but remember, I carry your secret with me. The journey I purpose taking is a

long one, and perhaps I shall not return as soon as I hope. In the meanwhile you and Martha will stay here, however long it may be. And until you hear from me, you are neither of you to leave here for a day even. If you disobey me, you know the consequences. You can meditate in solitude here on your past short-comings, and how charmingly you brought up your beautiful daughter. She once possessed what you never did—a heart, but you did all you could to corrupt it. You rejoice in Elvira Casterton's death. There you are wrong, for had she lived, she might have persuaded me to be less severe with you and your child, and then Martha's life would have been a happier one. Now the only softening influence is gone, the day may yet come when you will wish you could bring her back to life, in order to

intercede for you, and keep you from your punishment."

The captain turned on his heel as he finished speaking, and, unlocking the door, went out.

CHAPTER V.

IN every human being's heart, however bad or wicked it may be, there is always some tender memory, some soft feeling, which asserts its power from time to time, and acts as a redeeming influence on the worst sentiments of our nature.

It is not often encouraged, it is rarely allowed to assume any expression, either in outward actions or words; but still it is there, exerting a subtle influence over the soul, rendering it amenable to good at unguarded moments, and, in seasons of unex-

pected danger or sorrow, sometimes asserting its sway.

So it was with Martha: pride, selfishness, and vanity were the ruling passions of her life, but underneath all was a strong, warm affection for her father. From her childhood she had her own way; every one around her had yielded to her wishes and passions; she had never been taught to think of others, till she grew up a selfish, proud woman, without heart or softness for any single being but her father. For him she had great affection. He had spoiled and petted her to an extent that had made her hated, for he had encouraged her in every act of tyranny amongst servants and those dependent on her for pleasure, till she had no other person left to care for but him.

Her mother was a foolish, sickly woman

who had never exerted her influence in the house, but allowed her child to rule it as she pleased, without checking her temper or leading her to govern her outburst of anger at the smallest provocation.

When she grew up a beautiful, lovely woman, with a fascination of manner that was a dangerous gift in the hands of one so educated, she carried into society the same wilful spirit and selfish feeling towards others, that had distinguished her as a child.

She made few friends; for all who knew her best, shrunk from her pride and utter disregard of their feelings, and even where her rare loveliness captivated, she repelled the expression of all warmer friendship, by her cold indifference and haughty selfishness. Of real friends she had none; she could charm and fascinate every one in a

drawing-room, but beyond that she did not care to please. A kind action, a sympathizing word for those around her in trouble she never cared to indulge in, and her friends soon found out that the moment her self-interest was touched she was as hard and unfeeling as adamant.

She became jealous of the affection displayed to others, less outwardly gifted than herself, and it made her angry to know that no one loved her but her father. She hugged to herself the belief that he cared for no other human being besides his child; for her he would forget honour and duty and all men commonly hold dear, if only she approved of what he did, and in a selfish but warm, passionate way she returned this affection.

The only being she loved besides her father was Edwin Casterton. She had met

him abroad the first time she had left her native land.

She admired his powers of expression and the rich flow of his words. His manly form and proud bearing she sympathized with, for she gloried in her own beauty, and liked others to share in the same personal advantage. But what specially won her heart was his independence of action, and as she believed, his utter disregard for the opinion of the whole world.

When he admired her beauty and was enchanted with the fascination of her manner, she determined to try and win him for her husband at no matter what cost or at what sacrifice to others. What did it matter to her if she made others miserable? She had always found Elvira as a rival in their school-girl days, what did she care now if in accomplishing her objects she made the

wife of the man she loved an outcast and a scorn before the world, provided only *she* could become at last Lady Casterton? For this she intrigued, for this she stooped to every artifice unworthy of her name and womanhood, and for this she would have spared nothing—neither money, nor friends, nor good name itself—except her old father.

In this humour she was forced into marrying Arvid Ström.

She felt mortified and embittered, but she had no power to vent her anger on the man who had quietly, calmly, and systematically made himself master both of her father's fate and her own. Once married to him, she hoped to be able to free herself from his power, and continue her scheming no matter at what cost. But she was disappointed.

Her husband was always gentle and calm with her, but he nevertheless asserted his authority in such a way that there was no alternative but to submit. Daily he quietly compelled her to review her past life, and obliged her to reflect on the heartlessness of all her past actions. Her bitterest moments were caused by the knowledge that there existed another being besides her father, who knew of the harm she had done. It was a daily torture to her to be compelled thus to live in the past, and she began to blame her father in her heart as its primary cause; but then her earnest clinging affection for him exerted its supremacy, and stood between him and her anger. It compelled her partially to know that there was *one* who loved her for herself just as she was, even when she dreaded most to hear her husband calmly and sar-

castically analyze her least fault, and deplore her want of affection.

It was a daily struggle and torture for her to be compelled to live in the society of the man before whom her father trembled.

It was a bitter, bitter punishment to her for all her intrigues; and she began to look pale and thin, to dread the sound of her husband's voice, and to speak as little as possible for fear he should sting her through her father by some cutting remark or quiet sneer at her want of heart. No wonder then when the news came of the shocking and early death of Lady Casterton, she felt inclined in the bitterness of her soul to cry out to her father, "See, this is your work!"

It was the first time since her marriage that she had a chance of saying a few words alone to him; her heart felt ready to break with grief, and it would have been a

relief to have spoken unreservedly to him for an hour or more; but their conversation was interrupted, and Martha was obliged as usual to follow her husband's behest and leave the two men together, and retire to her own room.

Her husband was not long after her. He had promised not to keep her waiting, and he kept his word. She was standing at the window of their bedroom when he entered. She did not move her head, although she knew he was there.

Seeing she would not speak first, he said—

"I must tell you to-night that to-morrow morning very early I am leaving Skoggard on a long journey."

She turned round quickly, and a gleam of satisfaction passed over her countenance.

"You seem pleased with the idea of my going," he continued.

"The reason for it will astonish me more, I am sure," she answered, as she left her place by the window.

"That is very likely, I confess, but don't create any false illusion on the subject. You and your father stay here."

"And what will *oblige* me to do that if I don't choose?" asked Martha.

"My wish and will only. Your father can tell you the consequences of disobeying me another time. He knows I am not going alone, and that it will be best for us all if you do as I have arranged during my absence."

He sat down on the sofa looking very grave. The light from the lamp fell on his face, showing how sad and melancholy and anxious its expression was. Martha stood

near him on the hearth-rug regarding her husband intently, and wondering at the strange change which seemed to have come over his face. Anger and passion she was accustomed to see imprinted on his stern features, but never before had she noticed this wistful, anxious look.

"Is he grieving for her death?" she thought. "If so, what kind of feeling had he for her? Was it love, I wonder? How could he marry me and take so quietly the fact that she belonged to another? Can one—is it possible to love several at the same time? Can we escape hating the one who comes between us and our love? I cannot understand it at all."

"You don't understand what love is, Martha," said the captain, answering her unexpressed thoughts. "Perhaps you will never know, never understand, that holy

and self-sacrificing feeling. Once I, too, like you, gave myself up to an unworthy passion. I could not renounce it—so I thought, at least—and I let it tempt me to actions which brought sorrow and disgrace in their train. Years are past since then, and now only I know how deeply one can love without being a slave to one's own passions."

He stretched out his hand to his wife. She went near him and put hers in his without any sign that she did it but simply to follow his wish.

"If I could give up—if I were not obliged to work out my revenge," continued the captain, as he stroked the little hand which lay so passive in his, "I could find it in my heart to love you, it would make us both very much happier."

She smiled bitterly, but did not answer.

"You smile, and think that it would be impossible to care for me, as all your heart belongs to Casterton; but, Martha, that man never has loved, and never will love you. I once promised to give you a proof of this, and I will before I go away. A moralizer says somewhere, 'That each fault and each unworthy feeling is a stain on the soul.' He is right; and to love another woman's husband is to succumb to a weakness which leaves a stain, an indelible stain, on the soul, that nothing can wipe out. And now, Martha, I won't disturb you too early in the morning, so I shall sleep in my dressing-room to-night. Farewell." He kissed her forehead, and added, "It is possible we may never meet again, that my death will spare you the sorrow of seeing me back here, but that would be a terrible misfortune for you and your father. Pray God, therefore, to

bring me back safe and well. Here, take this letter, it will show you what kind of affection Casterton had for you, and prove that if you were free this moment you would not be his wife. By wickedness, Martha, it is very rarely we arrive at happiness. Farewell. Much will happen ere we meet again."

He went towards the door; Martha followed him with her eyes. As he touched the handle she asked—

"When do you return, and where are you going?"

"Where I am going is my secret; when I return I cannot say; but if I do, be careful you have not disobeyed my wishes, otherwise it may go badly with you."

He opened the door, and a moment after Martha was alone.

On the table lay the letter which was to show her that she had never been dear to the man she loved with all the heart she possessed, and that he had only played with her for his own amusement.

She hesitated ere she opened it. Turning it round in her hand, she murmured to herself—

"I may as well drink the bitter draught! Surely knowing that he only played with me will give me strength to hate him."

She tore open the envelope.

Inside was the letter Edwin had written to Elvira the night he last left Timasjö. Its effect on Martha we will cover with the veil of silence. Heartless and wicked as she had been, she had yet feeling enough left to shrink from this bitter punishment

and the suffering she knew awaited her in the perusal of the letter from the hands of the man she had cared for, if not wisely, at least too well.

CHAPTER VI.

HE war was over at last, and those of England's warriors whom death had spared on the field and in hospital, had returned home.

Many were invalids for life, others had lost a limb, but life and health were restored, whilst some were still suffering from the effects of their wounds, and very doubtful as to the ultimate result or even certainty of cure.

Among the latter was Lord Casterton. He had joined in the war as a volunteer, and made himself conspicuous by his

bravery and utter disregard of all danger. Wherever the fire was heaviest and bullets thickest, there he was to be seen urging on his men, and proving by his own courage how little he feared the dangers which assailed him. He saw his comrades struck down one after the other, but he himself remained untouched.

At the battle of the Alma he had fought long and bravely; the contest was over, and the enemy were retiring, when, amongst the few last shots fired, he was wounded in the side by a bullet. He fell; and as he lay on the ground, unable to defend himself, a soldier on the enemy's side gave him a sword thrust, which, but for the interposition of a brother-officer, would have been fatal then and there.

He was carried from the field under the direction of one of the sisters of mercy, and placed in the care of the surgeon, but so

sorely wounded that the doctors gave no hope of his recovery.

But Sister Marie devoted herself to nursing him; she never left him night nor day, and her skill and care succeeded at last in bringing him back to life.

The doctors were astonished, and congratulated her on this wonderful recovery. The bullet had been extracted, the fever spent itself, and the patient was slowly recovering his reason and strength. He could see no one around him, for the wound in his head had affected his eyes, and the doctors feared he was blind for life. As soon as he was strong enough to be moved, he was, according to his own earnest wish, placed on board one of the transport ships, and brought to England.

Sister Marie accompanied him, and it was she who was ever by his side soothing

his pain, and when that was beyond her power, trying to comfort and quiet him; and, when he was strong enough to bear it, reading to him in French any article or book she thought likely to amuse or interest her patient. Sister Marie could neither speak nor understand a word of English.

The journey to Casterton reopened his wound, and the fever returned in full force.

Weeks and months passed away before he was again able to be up, during which he suffered agonies, and, but for the untiring care of his patient nurse, he must have succumbed to this second and more painful attack.

He had crept from his bed to the sofa, and by the time the spring came he was able to take short walks in the park,

leaning on Sister Marie's arm, and with a broad bandage across his eyes.

Casterton was a fine old place, and had been the family seat for many hundreds of years. Around it lay a beautiful park, and the gardens and pleasure grounds were most tastefully arranged. Everything about the house and grounds betokened care, and riches sufficient to keep it in order, and, beyond, through the trees here and there, a peep could be had of the blue sea in the distance, studded with white sails, and the curling smoke of the fast-going steamers.

It was a spot well fitted for the home of an invalid. The air was soft and pure, and sweet with the perfume of the sea-breezes; the walks were sunny and green, and the garden was blooming with the brightest of flowers.

Day after day in the warm spring weather Casterton was induced by his faithful attendant to spend several hours in the open fresh air. She would lead him to the places he liked best, and then, sitting down by his side, would talk to him, and describe the beauties around them, and try and distract him from his pain and weariness.

Often he would sit for hours silently listening to the restless rolling of the waves against the shore, with a sad expression of listlessness and pain in his face and attitude.

Sister Marie never spoke to him when he was in one of those silent moods. She would also be still, and resting her face in her hands, would gaze idly before her, as if dreaming of some far-away dear one,

He it was who always broke the silence. Sometimes he would stretch out his hand, and with a gesture intimate his desire to be led farther—or perhaps he would say suddenly,

"Ma sœur, read to me!"

And she, without a word or a question, would open the book she always carried in her pocket or bag, and begin reading to him from some favourite author.

There was always something hard and short in his manner to her, as if he could not understand that the care she gave him was worth more than mere money could buy. He seemed by his manner to imply that he had a right to all the nursing and tender forethought for his comfort she surrounded him with from morning to night, and that it was not necessary for him to treat her in any

special, friendly way, or to show his gratitude by kind words and a gentle manner.

When his pain was greatest, and the fever was at its height, it seemed to soothe him if she held his hand; but now that he was better, he held himself aloof from all such weakness, knowing that familiarity of that kind was not becoming between a gentleman of his position and the nurse who tended him.

It never seemed to strike him that Sister Marie was perhaps of noble birth, too, and that any other cause than interest or duty might have led her to accept the onerous post of a working sister of mercy.

In spite of his abrupt manner and quick, short words he seemed restless and uneasy

if she left him for an hour, and generally sent a servant for her if she did not return to his side the moment she promised to be there.

One day in the middle of May he desired to be led down to the shore. The air was mild and soft, and he sat down, and fell into a reverie, as the waves rose and fell in monotonous regularity not half a mile away from where they were sitting. Suddenly lifting his head he said,

"I have been told, ma sœur, that you are young, and very beautiful; if that is true, why have you chosen the strange path of nursing the sick? Has life then nothing hopeful for you?"

"I have only one wish," she answered, after a moment's hesitation, "and that is to try and overcome the evil

I have done by bringing ease to those who suffer."

"Then it was simply to do good that you risked your life in the dangers of the war?" he answered, as he put his elbow on his knee and leant his chin thoughtfully on his hand.

Sister Marie did not answer, she was looking out over the sea, and the colour mounted to her cheek as if the question disturbed her.

"Was it only to do good you went there?" he asked again.

"Not quite—not entirely," she said; "it was I think a stronger feeling prompted me to go to the Crimea."

"Stronger than repentance? You said just now you wished to atone for the evil you had done."

"Now I wish that—" she said under her

breath, adding, "but it was not that alone which determined me to leave my country and follow the army as a nurse."

"What was it then?" he asked abruptly, as he fidgeted his bandage.

"It was affection, my lord," she answered in a trembling voice.

"Why what do you mean? I thought you wanted to die yourself?"

"Oh, no! I sought him whom I loved. I wished to be near him, to aid him if in trouble, or to die with him if he died."

"But you live, and are not by his side. That's just the way women usually carry out their plans! Come, give me your hand and let us go! Is the one you loved dead?"

She stretched out her hand to him, but she trembled as she answered:

"Yes, he is dead."

They turned to go back to the house. After a few steps, Casterton continued:

"I have been told that the shot which killed my wife, struck her as she was stooping over me after my fall. Can you tell me, ma sœur, if that is true?"

"I heard so too," she quietly remarked.

"Didn't you see her? I thought the doctor told me you did?"

He stood still, his chest heaving with emotion.

"I came to the spot a few moments later."

"Then you saw her dead?" he asked, holding her hand so tight it hurt her.

"I must beg, my lord, that you leave this painful subject," she whispered; "it will make you ill."

He did not say a word more, but continued walking silently till they reached

the house. Then he entered the library, and ordered a sofa to be drawn close to the window. Throwing himself on it he lay still for half an hour resting after his walk.

Presently he sent for Sister Marie. When she stood by him he said impatiently:

"Come and sit near me, ma sœur."

She drew a low stool to the sofa, and sat down by his side.

"Give me your hand," he said again.

She put her hand in his.

"That is right. Now I mean you to tell me how Lady Casterton died."

"My lord," began Sister Marie in a pleading tone, "don't ask—"

"Didn't you hear me say that I chose you to do it," he interrupted angrily, "that it is my will you tell me? Do you

think I have such weak nerves that I can not listen to an account of the circumstance which made me a free man without being ill? I want to know how it happened and if you won't say, then I will call James He was close by when I fell, he helped carry me from the field, he told me, and he will be sure to know how my wife died."

Sister Marie drew her hand softly away and said firmly and gently:

"I cannot give you the information you wish to have, but if you like I will call James."

"Do so!"

She rang the bell.

"The bandage over my eyes is loose, will you fasten it for me?" asked Casterton.

She hastened to his side to arrange it for him, and while she was fastening it the servant entered.

"The bandage is right now," said Sister Marie, "and while you talk to James, I will go upstairs. You don't require me while he is with you."

"But you shall not go, you must remain," he answered, taking hold of her arm; "I want you to stay."

"Very well," she said gently, for she rarely denied him anything he asked, for fear of bringing on the fever. She sat down, noticing that his face beneath the bandage was heightened in colour, and that she knew was a bad sign.

"James," said his master, "I wish you to tell me all you know of Lady Casterton's death. I am stronger now and can bear it; besides, you were near her at the time, and must have seen her struck."

"My lord, just as her ladyship was stooping over your lordship, a ball from the

flying enemy hit her in the back. It was a momentary death, and Sister Marie would have shared the same fate, only she arrived a few minutes later on the scene."

"And where was her ladyship buried?" asked Edwin in the same cold tone he had asked his former questions.

"With the other wounded, my lord."

"That will do," said Lord Casterton, and as James left the room, he pressed his forehead with both hands.

"That account has agitated you," exclaimed Sister Marie, "and your wound is paining you I can see;" adding as she laid her finger on his pulse, "you have fever too! You will never get well at this rate, my lord. You know the doctor said you were to keep quite quiet."

"Quiet!" he exclaimed impatiently. "Do you think that is possible? Do you think

that I can be quiet, that my brain will be still because my lips are silent? Besides, what is the use of life to me? You know well enough, ma sœur, that the future is a blank to me."

Kneeling down by the sofa, she whispered softly:

"You must have loved your wife very dearly for her death to grieve you so?" It was the first time she had voluntarily asked him a question concerning his feelings.

"Yes I did, and yet I cannot help being thankful now for what has happened," he answered sadly.

Sister Marie leant her head against the sofa end. After a pause, she said:

"Was she not worthy of your love?"

"Give me your hand and lead me to the balcony, ma sœur," Edwin said instead of answering.

She rose unwillingly and did as he begged her.

When they stood in the fresh air, he remarked in a quiet voice as if speaking to himself:

"Was she worthy of my love? I think so, I believe so, for I loved her as well as man could love woman; but in spite of that —if she had lived—she would never have been anything to me but a cause for sorrow. There was a reason which would always have separated us. I like to grieve for her as dead."

He laid his hand heavily on Sister Marie's shoulder as he spoke, and sighed deeply.

Presently he broke the pause:

"You shiver, ma sœur. What makes you tremble? Are you ill?"

But she did not answer.

"Perhaps the air is too fresh for you," he continued in a softer tone than he usually spoke to her. "What is the matter, ma sœur ?"

She waited a moment ere she replied to his last question, wearily, and as if it pained her to speak.

"Nothing, nothing, only a shiver which is gone now."

"Perhaps you require rest; you are too good to me," he said, turning his face—with its heavy black bandage across the eyes—towards her.

"No, no, I am quite well I assure you. It was only a passing shiver I know."

"Then will you read to me a little ?" he asked with a strange gentleness in his voice.

"You always calm me best that way, ma chère sœur."

"Willingly," she answered; adding,

"but will you not go inside? Here I am afraid it is too cold for you to sit much longer."

They went in, but the reading did not go well. Sister Marie's voice was husky, she constantly lost her place, and it seemed as if the tears in her eyes prevented her finding it.

At last Lord Casterton said in his usual abrupt way:

"Put the book down, ma sœur, and tell me what it is troubles you? I can hear you are crying, so there is no need to deny it. I would give much to be able to see your face and read there for myself—if possible—the cause of your distress."

"And what interest can that have for you, my lord?" she asked, wiping the tears off her cheeks.

"Do you imagine then, that after all the

care and tender nursing you have given me for weeks and months I am indifferent, think nothing about the one who has been so good to me?" he asked in his turn, in a low tone. "Can you not understand how grateful I am?"

"There is no need for gratitude, Lord Casterton. You promised me money, a great deal of money if I would come with you to England and continue nursing you. I came; but I did it without expecting any other payment than the reward of my own conscience that I had done my duty. When I go I shall not take your gold, for I do not need it. My one and only recompense shall be your complete restoration to health. You are not indebted to me for any thanks."

"Then you will take nothing from me, neither in substantial gold nor ingratitude?"

"I will have no recompense, for I could not keep it," she answered.

"And what prevents you from keeping my gold as well as my gratitude?"

"The gold I do not require, and the gratitude—if I accepted that, it might be difficult for me to go away."

"Go away!" exclaimed Edwin, half starting from his chair, "what do you mean?" he added tenderly as he leant nearer towards her.

Sister Marie rose from her seat and went towards the window. She was very agitated, and did not dare trust her voice to answer.

"Why will you go?" he said, again stretching out his hand to her.

"Why? Simply because in a few weeks I hope you will be well enough to do without me, my lord. You are already getting

much better," she answered slowly and with effort.

"So you mean to give me up?"

"I will stay as long as you require my nursing, then our paths separate."

"Why do you say that? Have you thought that for long years, perhaps for ever, I shall be without my sight, of the weary, bitter fate mine will be, all alone here in an eternal night, without any one to make life endurable to me? Think of all the sorrow I have had, and how hard my lot is now—blind, always blind—surely, ma sœur, your duties can not finish with the healing of this wound!"

She was silent.

Edwin raised his head, expecting an answer, but none coming, he continued, proudly,

"You have refused all recompense, all

acknowledgment of your care for me. You thus prove that you have done it purely from a sense of duty. Well, then, if such is the case, you must stay by your patient as long as he needs you, or as long as his pain is eased and soothed by your presence."

"So long as you suffer pain I will stay, or as long as there is any fear of the fever returning, but after that I shall go, and then you must seek some one else to make the darkness light to you, and help you pass the hours away."

Her voice faltered as she spoke, but he did not seem to notice it.

"You think I shall find some one willing to do all that you say, for me, ma sœur? Come here, and give me your hand. Do you think I shall find another to be a light to my darkness?"

"I hope so, my lord. I am quite sure that you will no longer care for me when you have quite recovered your strength."

He dropped her hand, and said, with a sigh,

"Perhaps you are right." Then he added, proudly and coldly, "You are free to go when you will. I beg your pardon for asking you to stay. Pray do as you judge best in the matter."

"But, my lord, I have said I will stay—as long as you need me. Don't be vexed that——"

"I am not vexed, ma sœur! What right have I to retain you in this dull place? I shall soon be, as you say, strong again—that is all. I shall in time grow accustomed to this helpless life, not able to move without a guiding hand, but—but I would far rather have died."

The tears were in her eyes as she looked at him, but ere she could answer, the doctor was announced, and she quietly left the room.

CHAPTER VII.

THE next morning, when Sister Marie was making the breakfast, Lord Casterton entered the room, led by the doctor.

He looked much better and stronger that day, and seemed in good spirits.

"How are you this morning, my lord?" asked Sister Marie, coming forward, and taking his hand.

"Is my tea ready?" he asked, in reply.

"Yes, quite."

"Then give the doctor a cup, too." Then turning to his medical attendant, he added,

in English, "It will be very kind of you, doctor, to read me the 'Times' this morning. I have been obliged to give my secretary a few days' leave, and he generally does it for me. I am tired of hearing nothing but French. My lady nurse there can't say a word of English, which bothers me often enough. I am meditating giving her her congé. Do you think I may dispense with her services soon?"

"Soon? Yes, I think so, in a week or two."

"Very well, then I shall make inquiries for an Englishwoman in her place."

Sister Marie poured out the tea, and then quietly went over to the window. Leaning her head as far out as she could, the morning air seemed to bring back the colour which had suddenly forsaken her cheeks. She stood there without moving,

whilst the doctor read aloud the "Times," not even turning round when he folded up the paper, and took his leave.

Edwin sat still for half an hour, and Marie did not move from her place. At last he raised his voice and said,

"Ma sœur, are you in the room?"

"Yes, I am here," she answered, still not moving from the window; adding, "Do you want anything?"

"Come over here, I want to hear your voice."

"*You*, my lord!" she exclaimed, slowly going near him.

"Do you wonder at that? I told you yesterday you were necessary to me."

"You are very good; but——"

"You will not understand me," he interrupted. "I always notice that. You wish me to fully believe that all you do is

from only one motive. You have devoted your life to acts of mercy, and you nurse me from duty, without any personal interest in your patient. And what can *I* say to the contrary? But I don't mean to talk any more on the subject. Will you read to me?"

He laid himself back in his chair, as if weary and tired, whilst an expression of content crept into his face.

Sister Marie did not answer, but quietly went up to the bookshelves.

There she stood still, but without taking one from the case.

After a few minutes' patient waiting, Edwin raised his head, saying,

"Well, ma sœur, did you not hear? I wished you to read aloud?"

"Yes, I heard your wish," she answered, quickly; "but I'm thinking that the

French language wearies you, and I'm sorry to say that I can't read any other."

"Well, really! It seems to me that you must understand English tolerably well," broke in Edwin. A smile, the first that had been seen on her lips, lighted up her beautiful features.

"I congratulate myself that I just understood enough to gather that you find it wearisome having a nurse who can only speak French. I learnt the language at school, you see, my lord; and now and then I can understand a word, though I do not pretend to speak or read it. But now I wish to tell you that to-day, if you like, I will release you from hearing only French. You no longer need my nursing."

Her voice trembled as she finished.

"So you will deprive me of the best

nurse in the universe?" said Edwin, harshly.

"I wish to spare you the necessity of giving her leave to go."

"You are home-sick; you want to go back to France, and you make use of my words to enable you to carry out your heart's wish; you are selfish, ma sœur!"

"My heart's wish!" exclaimed Sister Marie, in a tone so sad that Edwin started, and felt sorry he had moved her to such agitation.

"It is natural you should wish to visit your native land after such a long absence, and quite natural you should long to be amongst your own people. You have not had the courage to say so, for fear I should let you go before I was free from pain."

"I should never have had courage to say I would go, if I had not heard this

morning that my presence wearies you," she said, touched by his kind tones.

"But you told me yesterday that you meant to leave me."

"Ah! yes, I did, because——"

She hesitated, and was silent.

"Give me a glass of water, ma sœur, I am thirsty."

She poured out the water, and brought it to him. As he took the glass from her hand, he held both in his, asking earnestly—

"Why was it you told me yesterday that you intended leaving me—that you must return to your home? Will you tell me the truth?"

He put his bandaged face close to hers with a movement so quick and unexpected, that she drew back as he repeated—

"Marie, ma sœur, tell me the truth."

"I will not repeat what was never my real intention. I merely wished to know if you liked me to stay and be with you," she answered, blushing, although she knew he could not see her.

"But you knew I wished it. I told you so more than once, and, notwithstanding my assurance, you still persisted in saying you would go."

"I hoped you would entreat me to remain," she whispered, drawing her hand away, and turning her hot cheeks out of the light.

"And if I had said, 'Marie, stay by me, your presence is as necessary to me as the air I breathe,' what answer would you have given?"

She hesitated, and her breath came

quick and fast, till she feared he would hear it.

"Will you not answer me?" The voice was strangely soft and subdued.

"Oh! my lord—if you had said that, willingly would I have accepted any place you chose to offer me, and have been thankful and happy that you wished me near you; but now—now I know that——"

"That I meditate sending you away because I cannot bear the French language?"

"Yes—and for that reason I shall go."

She burst into tears as she sat down on a chair by his side. He let her sob unchecked for some moments, then rising, he stooped over her, and putting his arm round her waist, said—

"Sœur Marie, why do you weep?"

"Why do I weep!" she cried, and for a moment she leant her head on his shoulder, but drawing herself from his embrace, she added proudly: "I weep because it pains me to know that I have so badly fulfilled my duty to you—that you will send me away simply because I can't speak your mother tongue. I weep, too, because you are willing to let me go, and I hoped to have tended you so well that you would have been able to find no one else capable of taking my place. And I can't help weeping, too, because I must go. Oh! Lord Casterton, I wish I could die now, and forget that you said those cruel words!"

"And if you died now, what would become of me?" he asked, passionately.

"You would be free from the weari-

some French," she could not resist the temptation of replying, smiling through her tears.

"Méchante! Listen to me. You have said too much to be able to run off and leave me without saying a little more. You have shown me to-day that your temper is a very impatient one. Now that is a mistake, Marie, for it might bring trouble on you, and if not on you, then perhaps on the one you love and——"

He stopped suddenly, and sat back on the sofa, and passed his hand over his bandaged forehead as if tired or in pain.

Marie looked up at him, and was shocked at his pale face.

"Are you ill, my lord? what is it?" she asked, anxiously putting her hand on his shoulder.

"Nothing," he said, absently.

"But you are pale."

"Am I? It is long since I felt so well," he persisted; "and if I continue to feel as I do now—stronger and better than I have for years—it will depend entirely upon you!"

"Upon me! If you depend upon me you will never have pain again."

"Are you sure? Are you certain you will never bring me pain and sorrow again, Marie?"

"Yes, quite sure, for I will ward off every sorrow from you, and——"

"Will you promise to stay with me, and prove your words true by never leaving me till I get back my sight? And if it is never restored, then you must never go from me—you will be the light of my eyes, my comfort, and my life's good angel?"

He felt for her hand, and pressed it passionately to his lips.

And in a trembling voice she half whispered—

"I will stay till you send me away."

And drawing her hand from his clasp, she moved softly from the room. As the door closed after her, Edwin drew a deep sigh of relief, and, folding his arms over his chest, murmured to himself—

"At last!"

CHAPTER VIII.

SOME weeks had passed since Sister Marie gave the promise to stay. They had returned to their usual distant relation to each other, and Lord Casterton had resumed, if anything, a more reserved and proud manner towards his companion and un tiring nurse.

It almost seemed as if he wished her to understand that the scene which had taken place between them relative to her remaining with him, had passed from his memory, and that it could not possibly

have any influence on his daily and hourly intercourse with her. She had promised not to leave him till his sight was restored, and having gained his wish, he apparently forgot all about the cause which led to it, and did not care by any increase of confidence, or softer and more friendly manner, to show his gratitude for her concession.

One morning Sister Marie was reading to him as usual. He had chosen one of Voltaire's works, and at its conclusion he made a few contemptuous remarks on the bad use Voltaire had made of his wonderful genius, and of his influence over the men of his time.

Sister Marie defended him, and a lively discussion followed, which Lord Casterton suddenly interrupted with—

"Your knowledge has often surprised

me, ma sœur. You must be the daughter of high-born parents."

"On the contrary, my lord, I am a child of the people, a foundling."

"I can hardly believe that."

"But it is nevertheless true."

"Then you must have had a splendid education, and very careful bringing up."

"If by a splendid education you mean that from a child I have been surrounded by clever people and the luxuries that money can procure, then I most certainly have had what you say."

"But how was that possible if you were, as you assert, a child of the people?"

"I have had others to thank for so much kindness," she answered, in a voice full of feeling and emotion.

A pause ensued, during which Edwin

constantly fidgeted the bandage over his eyes.

Presently he said—

"It would interest me a great deal to know something of your past history. You once said it was affection—love for some one which took you to the Crimea. Will you tell me the story of your life?"

"Yes, one day, but not now—not till you have your eyesight back again, and I say farewell to you."

"And if I never have it restored, and you never have to say farewell?"

"Then you shall still hear it if you wish," she answered, in a low tone.

"Why not now?"

"Because I cannot tell it now—and—and—you must not ask me."

For some moments he did not speak; when he did he remarked—

"Do you know, ma sœur, that this morning, when I was having my eyes dressed, the doctor told me I ought to have change of air? That next month a sea voyage would do me good."

"Did he?" she stammered.

"Yes he did. He wishes it, and I agree with him. You will keep your promise, be true to your word, and stay with me?"

"I never break a promise, but——"

"But you would like to be freed from it —ay, is that so?"

"I should like you to remain here at Casterton. I hate travelling," she answered evasively.

"You have made up your mind, then, to stay here?"

"Yes, if you do," she answered quietly.

Just then a servant entered, saying that a French officer wished to speak to his

master, but would not give his name or card. He had information respecting Lady Casterton.

Edwin started, but ordered the stranger to be shown in at once.

A minute later Captain Arvid Ström entered the room.

Sister Marie was standing near the window, a place she seemed to love, with her face half turned towards the new comer. The captain cast a quick, searching glance towards her, and seemed struck with her appearance, for some seconds elapsed ere he said to his blind host—

"Lord Casterton, I am grieved that you fared so badly in the war. I am Captain Ström—can——"

"Ah! Captain Ström, I am glad to see you," and Edwin stretched out his hand to his guest in that sad, hesitating way by

which those who are blind bespeak the sympathy of their friends.

Sister Marie had turned hastily away, as if she resented the look the visitor had cast on her, and, without a word or a sign, left the room.

The two men talked long and earnestly; and as soon after lunch as possible Captain Ström ordered his horse and left the house.

Sister Marie had not appeared again. She sent an excuse for her absence at lunch, and even after Ström had gone, she did not return to the library.

Lord Casterton sent for her, but she was not in her room.

It was late in the evening before she returned, and quietly entered the library. Edwin was walking up and down the room impatiently, and as rapidly as his blindness

would permit. At the sound of her light step he exclaimed—

"Is that you, ma sœur?"

"Yes, it is I. But why are you alone, and walking without any one to lead you?" she asked, anxiously. "It is unwise of you to risk a knock against some projecting piece of furniture," she added, going near to him.

He put his hand on her shoulder, as he answered,

"It was your fault, ma sœur. Where have you been? You have been sought everywhere, and my impatience to see you again prevented my keeping still."

"You didn't imagine I had gone away?"

"I hardly knew what to think."

"Lord Casterton, I have given you my word to remain. Until you send me away I shall not think of going."

"Give me your hand on that."

"Here it is."

She put her hand in his. Clasping it tight, he said, with a contented smile,

"You have thus bound your life to mine, for I shall *never* be the one to ask you to go."

One day towards the end of July, Edwin said to his faithful attendant—

"In a week I must leave Casterton. I mean to go and stay some time at Timasjö, my poor wife's property. You will go?"

"I!" exclaimed Marie, startled.

"Yes, certainly, unless you wish to withdraw from your word—and that injury, even in thought, I would not do you. Why waste words on the subject? In a week we start."

She did not answer in word—she merely

bowed her head over her work, and was silent. But he knew her silence meant consent, and a week later they both left Casterton.

CHAPTER IX.

IT was in the spring of the same year that Lord Casterton's agent in Sweden arrived at Timasjö.

He had received his lordship's orders to dismiss all the servants, to give each one a year's wages, and to insist that every one had left by the end of the following month.

Lord Casterton was coming to Timasjö, and did not wish to be waited on by any of the servants who had served in the château during his deceased wife's reign.

Fröken Kayhjelm was informed that she must retire to some other home during the

putting in order of Timasjö, and that her pension was to be continued the same as it was during Lady Casterton's life.

Lotta was to go to Altorp, and her wing of the château was to be fitted up for Mrs. Brow, who was daily expected at Timasjö, to superintend the extensive arrangements and changes to be made in the rooms in every part of the house.

New servants were engaged from Stockholm, and it was expected that a large retinue of domestics would follow their lord from England, who evidently intended making a long stay in his Swedish home.

One afternoon at the end of May, Captain Ström arrived at Skoggard, after an absence of more than six months from his young wife. Martha had passed this time in solitude at Skoggard. Not once had she left the place, or paid a visit to her

neighbours, or the town, which was within a few miles' drive. Beautiful and accomplished as she was, she passed the whole winter in the utmost retirement, refusing all visitors, and never leaving the house, except for a short walk to keep her in health.

She shrank from the questions and remarks her neighbours would be likely to make on the strange conduct of her husband, in thus leaving her for an indefinite period, only a month after her marriage, and to avoid them, she shut herself up, and would receive no one, not even Armida, even refusing to go to Stockholm for one single day, to hear a little good music, for fear of meeting any old acquaintances. She resisted every effort of her father to draw her into society, preferring to be alone as much as possible.

At last the count grew weary of seeing no one but his daughter, and began to invite a few friends to pass the evening with him now and again. But Martha would not meet them, and retired to her own room as soon as they arrived. This strange freak of hers to live entirely alone soon began to be discussed freely and maliciously among her relatives and friends, and in time all sorts of reasons were offered for her absence from the gay world around her.

Some of these, detrimental to his daughter's character, reached the ears of the count, who reproached her for her selfishness in thus shutting herself up, and repeated to her, in the hope of persuading her to appear abroad, some of the stories circulating about her and her husband.

"Let them talk and scandalize me as

they will," she answered. "I don't care what they say, as long as I can avoid hearing personally their curious remarks and seeing their pitying looks and impertinent smiles."

And so the winter passed, and the spring came, and she had not once received any sign from her husband. She knew not where he had gone, nor what he was doing, and did not trouble or care to know. She could not drive him entirely from her thoughts, simply because to her he was the source of all her grief.

When he left her, and she had read the letter which told her plainly how little Casterton had ever cared for her, she felt as if a burden had been suddenly laid upon her heavier than she had the strength to bear up against. Her pride and self-love had been wounded, and she feared that all

the world around her would know of, and divine her sorrow, and pity her for the false illusions she had encouraged and believed in for so many years.

As the spring advanced, the fine weather tempted her out of doors, and she extended her walks farther and farther each day.

For hours the "beautiful queen of the drawing-room," as she was generally called, would wander in the quiet paths of the forest, and under the shadow of the tall pines and outstretching firs, would brood over her sorrows and bemoan her fate, and ofttimes wish she had never been born.

Once or twice, in her wanderings, she had met Pastor Fredrik Brogren, and voluntarily stopped to speak to him. There was something pleasant and winsome about this young pastor which interested Martha and made her like to talk to him. He

loved his calling, and all the sacrifices it entailed upon him. One felt intuitively that he carried out the charity in his own personal intercourse with mankind that he preached from the pulpit, and that his sympathy for all who were in trouble or sorrow was as genuine as a kind warm heart and devotion to his work could make sincere.

The second time he met her in the forest, he spoke of Elvira's early and sad death so feelingly, and with such evident regret at her unfortunate fate, that Martha was glad when he lifted his hat and said farewell.

The next morning she went out as usual, and was walking up and down the avenue behind the house, when she saw a tall figure coming towards her.

She stood still, and her heart beat with a heavy painful action, for in the military,

firm gait of the man as he walked up the avenue she recognized her husband. She clasped her hands to her bosom and murmured to herself,

"Returned! returned!"

A few moments more and Captain Ström had taken her hands in his, exclaiming,

"Here I am you see. I cannot express how glad I am."

Martha's face did not respond to his joy, but the months of solitary communion and reflection had so far done her good, inasmuch as she recognized the entire uselessness of struggling against her fate, and that it would be better for her in every way if she could accept her lot and make it outwardly at least as little galling as possible. So she now tried to smile in return to his greeting, and give her hus-

band the semblance of a friendly welcome.

But he had sharp eyes, and he at once detected the effort the smile cost her, and the utter want of heart there was in her kindly-sounding words.

After a few questions on indifferent subjects, he said in his old cold commanding manner,

"I have brought my father with me, and I wish him to stay with us while we remain here in Sweden. I hope, Martha, you will be a kind daughter to him. He has had a rather sad life, and now in his old age greatly needs tenderness and affection."

She muttered some remark about being willing to be kind to him, and then silently they wended their way back to Skoggard. She expressed no surprise at the old

gentleman's presence in Sweden, and no curiosity as to how and where *her* husband had brought him to her father's home.

But when they reached the house and the captain bade her follow him to the room where his father was, before he opened the door Martha laid her hand on his arm and said imploringly:

"Arvid, not now, I cannot see him now. I must wait a little before I can meet him."

"There is no need to wait, he knows nothing about you, you can meet him without fear. He approves of my marriage with you."

And opening the door he made her enter.

In a large easy chair sat an old man looking more like a mummy than a human

being, so yellow and dried was his skin, and so spectre-like was his whole appearance.

The captain went forward, leading Martha by the hand.

"Here is my wife, Martha Stangenskjöld that was," he said, laying his hand gently on the old man's shoulder; "she wishes to bid you welcome, father."

He stretched out his hands, saying in an uncertain voice,

"Martha, Martha, how I remember that name; it seems so familiar to my ears, and was once dear to me. Come here, my daughter, and let me kiss you and bless you."

Could it really be the proud, heartless Martha who now stooped low before this ruin of a once handsome man, and pale and trembling let him take her in his arms

and kiss her? She raised his hand to her lips, for speak in words she could not.

When he released her she looked timidly up at her husband, and wondered what made him appear so moved.

She was leaving the room when he called her back and told her peremptorily to stay with his father.

"Arvid," she whispered for the second time within a few minutes, taking his arm and looking imploringly at him, "Arvid, be merciful and let me go!"

"*You* speak of mercy! when did you show it?" he answered looking straight down at her. "The word in your mouth is out of place, but soon you will need to understand it. I choose you to stay with my father." And without another word he left the room.

The next day he left Skoggard. He had business in Stockholm he said, but he should return later on in the summer.

CHAPTER X.

BOUT the beginning of August, one hot sultry day, Captain Ström returned from a long ride, and joined his wife who was sitting in a tent in a cool part of the garden.

Taking a seat by her side he said,

"You have heard, I suppose, of all the changes going on at Timasjö?"

"You told me about them yourself."

"Did you know that Lord Casterton has been there the last week?"

"No, that's news; is he?" she replied, suddenly flushing all over her face.

"Yes, he is there and attended by a Frenchwoman who nursed him through the illness following upon his wounds. When she arrived she was closely veiled, and so she is every day when she goes out with him for a walk. She is always with him. Apropos, I suppose you know, or have heard, how severely he was wounded, and that he is now blind?"

"Blind!" exclaimed Martha, turning white as a sheet as she gasped the word out.

"His misfortune seems to agitate you," said her husband, looking at her. "But that is not to be wondered at, seeing you were the original cause of it."

"I?" she said, scarcely above her breath.

"Yes, you. If I don't mistake it was you and a certain Fröken Kayhjelm who plotted to separate him from his wife, and

drove him to the Crimea, and it was there he lost his wife and got so badly wounded, and all through your intrigues. However, he has now got a consoler in his cousin la Comtesse Mourville, for the veiled lady can be no other than his first and dearest love, although that is a secret no one knows but myself. I had a glimpse of her when I went to Casterton just before my return here in the spring."

"You went to Casterton?" exclaimed Martha, trembling so much her work fell out of her hands.

"Yes; I had some news about Lady Casterton's relatives, and I thought it my duty to let her husband know about it. He was then fast recovering, and I saw the beautiful nurse sitting by him. She left the room as soon as I entered, but not before I had had a glimpse of her face. I

recognized in a second the lovely countess whom I had so often seen in Paris."

"Did you?" was all Martha could make her white lips utter. And all the while he continued speaking of Lord Casterton and his affairs she sat still, bearing as bravely as she could the sharp pain he seemed to take a cruel delight in making her suffer. He told of all he knew and had heard about the beautiful countess, and ended by saying that he should not be surprised if very soon a wedding were to take place between the blind nobleman and his unwearying nurse, Marie Countess Mourville, alias Sister Marie.

CHAPTER XI.

LORD CASTERTON had been some weeks at Timasjö; with him he had brought a large retinue of English servants, a secretary, his family physician, and his faithful nurse and companion, Sister Marie. The long journey from England had done him no harm, for he looked better and stronger than when last we saw him at Casterton.

He had regained much of his former proud bearing, his cheeks had recovered a healthy colour, and but for the broad black bandage across his eyes telling of the sad

loss of sight, and the lines about the mouth being somewhat deeper, one would hardly be able to realize the months of agony and fearful bodily and mental pain he had just been passing through. The expression in his face had changed; the stern, sarcastic look of the lips having yielded to one of quiet content and evident inward satisfaction and joy. Now and then he smiled, and when he did he looked almost a boy again. He received no visitors as yet, except Captain Ström, pleading his blindness as an excuse for wishing still to remain in seclusion.

In the park and private grounds orders were given for them to be kept free from all intruders, and from early morning till late at night the outer gates were guarded by men appointed by the bailiff to prevent the usual passers-by loitering near the house.

Curiosity was abroad to see the blind nobleman and his strangely-dressed companion. A sister of mercy in her black flowing garb was a sight unknown in the interior of Sweden, and it was natural many should wish to have a glimpse of her. But no one saw her; no one was gratified with even a passing peep at her face, for her veil was always down, and she rarely moved beyond the precincts of the garden, and the part of the park most hidden from view, and when in the house kept to her own rooms and the library. Even Captain Ström, who often visited Edwin, never saw her again, for if he arrived when they were walking, and a message was sent to him to join Lord Casterton in the park or garden, he always found him alone, and his French companion retreating, if not already out of sight.

To Sister Marie herself Edwin had not altered his manner. He was distant and cold as he had ever been, but sometimes he would be a shade less reserved, and talk oftener and longer than was his wont.

One morning he had begged to be led on to the terrace, and to have his chair placed there for him. It was a warm, luscious August day, and the wind there was came cool and fresh from the sea on this side of the château. Sister Marie sat on a chair close by within reach of his hand. She had laid aside her veil, and seemed to enjoy letting the wind play with her lovely hair, which was half unbound, and lay in thick rich brown masses on her shoulders.

She had one of George Sand's romances on her knee, but she was not reading, merely idly gazing before her on the beau-

tiful landscape bounded by the sea not half a mile away.

They were both silent, and an hour perhaps had slipped away, when Edwin said, in a voice which startled her by its tenderness,

"Will you tell me, ma sœur, what the feeling is which binds you to me?"

"Affection, my lord," she replied.

"Affection for the man or the patient?" he asked, as he put his hand to his bandage.

She coloured scarlet, although she knew he could not see her, and drooped her head slightly as she answered,

"If I feel it for the patient, then I must feel friendship for the man. The one can't exist without the other."

"Oh, yes it can, as I will show you," he replied. "You nurse a badly wounded man;

you see him slowly recover to life by your care; and you know that his return to health and strength is owing to you. The helpless invalid to whom your hand alone gives food and ease, becomes, as it were, a part of yourself, and in time you grow fond of him, because it is your work you are interested in. If he were old or young, well educated or not, it would be all the same to you as a nurse. You have nursed him because, as a baby, he was helpless in your hands, and you had to minister to his every want. All your thoughts are concentrated on the success of your work; and so you become bound up in it by sympathy and sweet womanly care, and give affection to your patient simply because it is a woman's nature to be tender and gentle to the sick. But what *I* want to know is, if you had not had to nurse me—if you had not had to

devote yourself to me for so many months, would you have given me the same friendship—the same affection you say you have for me now?"

"I should not have known you then so well, my lord," she stammered, "and I fear I should then have not *dared* feel anything else for you but respect."

"Is that true?" he said, giving a kind of jerk with his hand that disturbed his bandage; "I hardly dare believe it is."

Sister Marie was silent, but a heavy sigh rose from her bosom.

"Once you told me," he went on, finding he got no answer, "that you would be happy if you could remain near me; that you would be one of my lowest servants, provided I let you stay where I am. What a depth of affection and passionate intensity such words would imply if only they were

not mere conventional phrases? You are silent, ma sœur! Must I then believe that it was only a momentary feeling dictated them, and that now you regret you uttered such words?"

"I don't regret—I—they sprang from my innermost heart—and soul, and only expressed what I then felt, and—and always shall feel for you," she said, in a clear, low voice.

"But, Marie," he replied, leaning near her, "that is not affection only you—have for me, that is—love!" And he put his arm round her, adding, "You love me, Marie—and it was all a fiction, the story you told me about going to the Crimea out of love for some one."

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She did not draw herself away from his clasp—she did not even tremble as he held her tight to him, till she felt the beating of

his heart, and his warm breath coming and going on her cheek, as in her low musical voice, she whispered,

"It was love, and love which took me to the war."

"For whom? Marie, Marie, I must know."

"Edwin Casterton," she softly answered.

He clasped her tight in his arms, and pressed his warm lips on hers, and for one blessed moment forgot all his past sorrows and trials in the joy of the assurance her sweet words had given him.

"And I——" he began, but a knocking at the glass door interrupted him, and Edwin's valet spoke.

"Captain Ström is here, my lord, and begs to know if your lordship will receive him."

"At any other moment he would have

been welcome," he muttered, as Marie hastily moved away from him.

Throwing himself down on his chair, he said, impatiently,

"Tell the captain to come here."

The man vanished, wondering at his lord's anger.

"You are going, Marie?" said Edwin. "Give me your hand then, first."

A little hand was laid in his. He carried it to his lips, and then said, earnestly,

"Thank you—thank you. You little know how grateful I am to you for this last half-hour."

Steps were coming near, and a moment later she had gone.

CHAPTER XII.

THE next morning Edwin appeared thoughtful and anxious. He hardly spoke, eat no breakfast, and seemed restless and disinclined to settle to anything.

In the afternoon he took a little walk in the park, led, as usual, by Sister Marie, but he did not talk, and she was too glad to be silent and think over all he had told her the day before to care to interrupt his reverie.

On their return home, after she had ar-

ranged for him the bandage on his eyes, he said, quietly,

"Marie, to-day I am going to put your affection for me to the proof. Will you do what I ask?"

"If it is in my power, I will."

"You will give me that promise without knowing what I am about to demand?"

"You can never demand anything of *me* that *I* cannot fulfil," she answered, earnestly.

"You are right. I will never ask what will pain you to fulfil. My wish is simple and easily carried out. I want you to be in the large reception-room this evening, whilst I receive a few friends."

"But you promised that——"

"I would allow you to avoid all visitors. Yes, I know I did; and it is not my inten-

tion to break that promise. I only wish you to be there. I do not want you to be seen. You can sit in the deep window recess, behind the heavy silk curtains. There you will be near me, and yet unseen, hidden completely from every one's view. Don't ask why I wish this, or why I want you to be there at all. You will know the reason later on in the evening. Well, will you do this for me ?"

"I have already promised to fulfil your wishes," she answered, slowly.

"Thank you, ma sœur! Perhaps you would like to know whom I expect—what my guests are like ?"

"To me it is immaterial. I know none of them."

"One thing more," he said, holding her arm, and lifting his face near to hers as she stood by him. "Will you, just to please

me, take off this dress, and put on a coloured one ?"

"But, my lord, I don't under——-"

"Never mind that," he interrupted, hastily putting his arm round her slender waist. "Do it to please me; it is only a whim. But I should like, as I entertain my guests, to imagine you sitting behind the curtain, hidden from every eye, but radiant in the beauty I know nature must have given you, and dressed in soft becoming robes of a colour to suit this glorious hair. Will you do it?" he added, passing his hand over the masses of braids uncovered by the veil, which were coiled around her small head.

"But I only possess this black dress; I have no other," she answered.

Edwin was silent for a moment, as he

still caressed with a tender hand her hair, then remarked,

"Ah, well, do as you like. It was only a fancy of mine, which I won't insist upon. Would you mind asking Mrs. Brow to come here? I wish to speak to her about some arrangements for to-night. Come back to me, my—*darling*, in an hour," he added, as he felt her trembling in his arms. "Meet me in the big drawing-room," and, with a light kiss on her cheek, he let her go.

An hour later, Sister Marie entered the large reception-room, or big drawing-room as it was called, dressed in light blue of some soft, beautiful texture, that hung around her like a cloud. Standing in front of the young nobleman, she said,

"Here I am, my lord; and although you

cannot see me, I am dressed, as you wish, in a bright colour.

Edwin put out his hand, and felt the stuff; then passing his other hand over her hair, he said, in a melancholy tone,

"It pains me to-day that I cannot see you. I feel you are beautiful, and I would give much to be able to see with my eyes your features, and how you look in the pretty dress. I have only known two women whose faces I shall never forget, can't forget, one was my cousin, the Countess Mourville—but why draw back, dear Marie? The other was more charming still, it was my wife, Lady Casterton. I fancy you must be like one of the two."

Before she had time to answer, Mrs. Brow entered, saying:

"There is a carriage at the door now."

Sister Marie took her place behind the

curtains of the middle window, and she had only just dropped the drapery which was to hide her from the guests, and sat down on the low stool placed for her in the recess, when the door opened, and the servant announced:

"Count Stangenskjöld, and Captain and Mrs. Ström."

CHAPTER XIII.

EDWIN rose when he heard his guests enter the room, and made a half movement towards them, but Captain Ström stepped forward, and taking his hand, introduced his wife to him as an old acquaintance.

Martha's bearing was cold and proud. It made her angry to be in the presence of the man who had pretended to care for her, merely to answer his own purposes; and as her husband led her forward to greet their host, not a shade of sympathy for his misfortune was visible on her face, but an in-

dignant, proud disdain for the man she had loved, and for whom she had suffered many hours of wounded pain and bitter self-reproachings. She gave her hand to her blind host and received his few words of welcome in scornful silence, and then taking a chair sat down, and barely gave any answer to Mrs. Brow's attempts to lead her into conversation.

It almost seemed as if the proud woman felt herself insulted in being under the roof where Edwin passed his days by the side of the sister of mercy, whose position in the house was the subject of so much comment and curiosity in the neighbourhood.

It was not of her own free will that Martha had come to Timasjö. She had been forced into it by the artfulness of her husband, and for the first time in her life,

as she looked across at her father, she felt angry with him for also allowing himself to be so duped by her husband.

Just after their early dinner, Captain Ström had begged his wife to dress herself nicely and drive with him to Altorp for the purpose of paying Madame Brogren a visit, adding, that her father was going with them. She made no objection, and accordingly did as her husband desired, and an hour after, the three drove down to Altorp.

Mrs. Brogren was pleased to see them. Fredrik was at home, and he and Captain Ström had a long, earnest talk together while the ladies and the count drank coffee.

Presently the captain nodded to Martha to say farewell, the count rose, shook hands with Mrs. Brogren, and they all three returned to the carriage, as Martha imagined to go back. But nothing of the kind, the

horses trotted on, and in half an hour stood still at the Timasjö porch. Martha declared that nothing should induce her to pass the threshold of the house. But even while she was speaking, a couple of footmen opened the door and came forward to the carriage. The captain sprang out, and then offered her his hand to help her descend. She gave one quick look up to his face, and saw there the expression that she had learnt from experience to understand, and to avoid a scene before the liveried servants, she quietly took his arm, and allowed herself to be conducted up the stairs and into the presence of the man against whom her feelings were so very bitter.

As she sat listening to the talk between the gentlemen, she wondered very much to herself why her husband had thus dragged

her into paying a visit in his own house, to the one man he knew so well she had loved. Surely if he had had any manly feeling in his breast, he would not thus have forced her into his presence, and under such strange circumstances too; if only half what the gossips of the neighbourhood said was true. And she looked peeringly round the large, handsomely furnished room, as if in some vague way she had an idea that the veiled lady, the beautiful Frenchwoman, the one who daily ministered to the comforts and pleasure of Lord Casterton, would be hidden in some corner.

When tea and coffee had been handed to each guest, and the servants had retired, Captain Ström unceremoniously interrupted the conversation by remarking:

"I think the moment has come, Lord Casterton, for informing my wife and her

father why I obliged them to accompany me here this afternoon. Will you kindly let me shut the door communicating with the next drawing-room, Mrs. Brow?" he said, turning to the English lady, and in answer to her smile, closing the door himself. Then adding as he returned to his seat, "It is needless that any strange ears should hear what I am going to say. The reason we are here together now is—*Lady Casterton.*"

Count Stangenskjöld started as if he had been shot when his son-in-law pronounced that name, and Martha turned pale to the lips.

"Chance," continued the captain in a dry tone, "made me acquainted with many things concerning her, and as many of her family affairs are linked with the Stangenskjölds, I thought it best not to tell you

about them, my lord, without my wife and my father-in-law being present to hear what I have to relate."

Captain Ström was silent, and looked quietly from one to another.

The count seemed strangely restless. He bit his gray moustache, pulled it with his fingers, and fidgeted up and down on his chair, whilst his eyes glared at his son-in-law like live coals, as he said to him:

"I understand that this conduct of yours—"

"Pleases you, Herr Count," interrupted the captain, "I know that, and that is why I begged our noble host to allow me to say all I know in your presence. You are the only one who can prove the truth of what I am going to state. I myself am not fully able to judge of the certainty of many

things which I have heard concerning this deceased lady and her relations."

"Then," said Martha, speaking for the first time, "I fail to understand why you propose speaking on the subject at all."

"I should not, if there were any slur or any shadow likely to be thrown over Lady Casterton. What I have to say, refers to her parents especially, and much of my information I have gained from my *father*."

As he uttered this last word, slowly and distinctly, the count leant back in his chair, and a greenish paleness crept over his face, and he shut his eyes as if to avoid seeing some passing ghost.

"Everything, to the smallest detail, concerning Lady Casterton warmly interests me," said Edwin, "as is very naturally the case, for the Herr Count, your father, and

you, madam, must know that I never loved a woman so truly as I loved my wife."

The curtains at the middle window moved as if stirred by a sudden gust of wind, but no one seemed to notice it, save Mrs. Brow.

"And if the captain," continued Edwin, "can fulfil his promise, and clear up the cloud of mystery enveloping my wife's relations, I cannot see how it can possibly wound or hurt either you, Count Stangenskjöld, or Madame Ström; besides, whatever he says to this end is amongst ourselves, and only heard by those interested—"

"But Lord Casterton," said Martha, proudly, "pardon my saying, that if my husband proposes discussing family affairs in which my family are mixed up, it seems to me that it is but natural we should wish

no one but those immediately belonging to us should be present, no one else beside those connected with Lady Casterton and ourselves. Mrs. Brow belongs to neither the Casterton family nor the Stangenskjöld, and surely she—"

"Is she here?" interrupted Edwin. "I beg you to understand, Mrs. Ström," he continued, "that I am not likely to run the risk of injuring in the slightest degree the memory of the lady who bore my name, by allowing *strangers* to meddle in her family affairs; but Mrs. Brow *is* no stranger, and *I* choose that she remains in the room while we hear the history of my late wife's father, especially as she knew him well; you must therefore allow that she remains with us while we hear all the captain has to say."

Martha gave no answer in words, but flashed her large eyes full of anger and

annoyance on her host. At that moment she all but *hated* him.

There was a long pause which at last the captain broke by saying:

"About three and thirty years ago Timasjö was bought by a gentleman of the name of Von Harlén, who also owned a large place called Forsvik. His parents were gentlefolks, but too poor to give him a fortune. By means of hard work and lucky speculations he had succeeded in amassing a large fortune, and rendering himself the possessor of several large estates, and you may imagine that he spared neither money nor pains to make his life as easy and comfortable as he could. In his boyhood and early manhood he had known the sorrow and difficulties a very straitened income entails, and he determined not to marry till he had realized

a sufficiency ample for his family in the event of his having children.

"'Let a man be poor, and however honourable he may be, he is the slave of circumstances,' was a favourite saying of his, and to avoid such dependence he remained single till he had amassed riches enough to satisfy his every desire. Then he married Fröken Martha Stangenskjöld, the daughter of a nobleman of very old family, who brought to her husband, old enough to be her father, nothing but her youth and her beauty and a great power of enjoying all the pleasures which wealth is supposed to provide.

"The marriage turned out a very happy one. He loved his young wife, and lavished on her every luxury his heart could dictate and his money obtain, and she on her side returned his affection and made his

life one continual blessing and happiness. In the course of a year or two she presented him with a daughter whom they named Agda, and two years after another girl was born to them. But the day on which the child was baptized Nina, the mother died, and left her two little baby daughters to be brought up by her bereaved and sorrow-stricken husband.

"The children were consigned to the care of Von Harlén's unmarried sister, and for two years the inconsolable widower tried to drown his grief in foreign travel and constant change of scene. At the end of that time he returned to his native land, and devoted himself to his books and the education of his motherless little ones.

"He spared no expense for them, whatever was for their advantage or good he had procured at once, and he surrounded

them with everything that was useful and necessary and would fit them for the position in society to which their birth and large fortune naturally entitled them. His love for his little daughters was very partial; for the eldest, Agda, he exhibited great affection and intense devotion, but to little Nina he seemed indifferent and unloving.

"He was a very severe and proud man, and to those for whom he had no warmth of feeling he was reserved and cold, and so he was to Nina. One could hardly accuse him of being hard or unkind to her, but the child instinctively knew he did not love her, and she shrank from his presence, and would neither laugh nor talk during the hours she was obliged to pass in the same room as her father.

"Agda was a bright, happy, frank-

hearted child, clever at her lessons, and a favourite with her schoolfellows and every one around her. She would give away to the poor all the money her father allowed her for her own use, and always seemed happiest when she could help those who were in trouble, and bring back a smile on a face swollen with tears.

"Nina, on the contrary, had a moody, jealous, and uncertain disposition. She was painstaking and persevering with her lessons, but selfish as regards others, and close and niggardly with her monthly allowance. She was intensely jealous of the love and affection her sister's winsome, charming manner obtained from all who came in contact with her, and she resented bitterly in her heart the absence of this love and affection towards herself. The father's partiality for his eldest born affected

all those who had the care of the children, and governesses, servants, uncles, and aunts all seemed anxious to follow the example of the head of the house and make a pet of the elder child and neglect and show indifference to the welfare of the younger. Nina brooded over this absence of affection, and learned in time to dislike her sister as the unexpressed cause as it were of her own unhappy lonely life.

"She was naturally a clever child, but slow in learning, and very uninteresting to teach, for she exhibited sullen fits of temper at times that rendered it not at all a pleasant task to have to instruct her. How far this was natural, or how much of it arose from the different way she was treated, of course I cannot say.

"When they were children Nina delighted in teasing her sister, and in trying to win

from her the affection she inspired and accepted wherever she went.

"The years passed on. The winters were spent at Forsvik, the summers at Timasjö, and the children developed into handsome charming girls of seventeen and fifteen. They were confirmed together, and the summer following this solemn rite they went with their father and aunt as usual to Timasjö.

"In the spring of this same year the old steward of the estate died, and in his place there was a new man appointed called Dahlström, who was married and had a son and a daughter.

"The latter was a governess in a foreign country in a nobleman's family, but the son was at home studying as an artist, and hoping one day to become a great and famous painter.

"August Dahlström was at this time a young man of twenty, with plenty of talent for his art, strong, passionate feelings, and with a blind faith in the ultimate success of anything and everything he undertook to do, but like most young men of his age, thoughtless and light-hearted, and utterly reckless as to the results or consequences of any of his actions."

"Agda had not been many days at Timasjö before she met August, and as is to be expected between a pretty girl of seventeen and a fine handsome fellow of twenty, the casual acquaintance soon became friendship, and in a few weeks they were fast friends.

"A witty Frenchwoman once said, 'L'amitié est l'amour sans ailes,' and so it proved with these young people. Before they were aware of it themselves, their friend-

ship had ripened into love, and long before the summer was at an end August and Agda had plighted to each other their troth.

"It happened that the very same day on which August told Agda of his love, that Herr von Harlén made arrangements with his steward for his son to give the young ladies lessons in landscape drawing.

"The proud old man never for one moment imagined that there was danger for *his* daughters in giving them a handsome fascinating young man as their companion, once or twice a week, to help them with their sketching. He was the steward's son, and in that capacity of course the girls would regard him and treat him as a dependent, and not as an equal. They had both much talent for drawing, and it pleased their father to give them every opportunity

within his power of developing and improving this accomplishment.

"The lessons, as you may imagine, my friends, were hailed with great delight by the young lovers, who lost no opportunity of expressing and receiving the mutual affection they had for each other. Often Agda would slip away from the drawing-room, full of visitors, and throwing a shawl over her head, would creep down into the park and assure her devoted knight that he, and he alone, possessed her heart, that the young noblemen at her father's table were nothing to her, and that if she could not be his wife she would live and die unmarried.

"And the weeks passed on, the summer was gone, and the late autumn saw the lovers separated for the first time since they had known each other.

"Herr von Harlén returned for the winter to Forsvik, and filled his house with visitors to amuse his darling and much-loved daughter Agda.

"Amongst those whom he assembled around his yule logs was a captain in the army, whom I will call by his Christian name of Carl.

"He was a cousin of the girls' mother, about seven or eight-and-thirty, and not at all good-looking.

"He had once or twice before paid a visit to Forsvik, but the girls were then children, and he was far too selfish a man to care to interest himself in any one from whom he had no hope of gaining any advantage.

"Now the case was different. Agda was a grown-up young lady, very beautiful in face and figure, if report spoke the truth,

and the co-heiress to one of the handsomest fortunes in the country. What if he could persuade her father to give him his daughter, and with her a few of those hundreds of thousands of rix-dalers he coveted? 'Surely,' he thought, 'Herr von Harlén will forgive my being a few years older than his child when he thinks of the title and old family name I can bestow upon her.' Besides, he knew that von Harlén had a great affection for all his wife's relations, and he counted upon this relationship, his clever head, and great name, to win him the bride whom he trusted before the winter was over he should have gained. He went to Forsvik, fell in love with the beautiful Agda, stayed two months in her father's house, and then proposed in due form to the young lady herself, and received a decided—refusal.

"Agda laughed at him for wishing to become her lover, and assured him that when she married she did not intend uniting her fate to a man who was old enough to be her father. The discomfited Carl immediately went to his host, but only received very unsatisfactory consolation.

"'I should like you for my son-in-law very much indeed,' said Von Harlén, 'especially as you belong to my late wife's family; but unless you can win my daughter's affection, I can give you no encouragement.'

"And with this unhappy termination to his hopes, he was obliged to leave Forsvik.

"The family returned to Timasjö, and Agda found herself again in the arms of her beloved August. She had corresponded with him during the winter by means of her lady's-maid, a girl of her own age,

called Lotta, whom she had known all her life, and for whom she had a strong attachment.

"The first two or three months of the summer slipped away in intense happiness for the young lovers. August was a favourite with Herr von Harlén, and was often invited to the castle to dinner or supper when the table was not filled with other visitors. The lessons in painting and sketching had been resumed by the father's express wish, and many delightful hours in each other's society were thus added to the stolen interviews in the park and orchards.

"One morning in the month of August Herr von Harlén entered the room where his daughters usually painted under the guidance of the young artist. Finding Nina alone, he asked her where her sister was.

"She did not answer immediately, and then as her father grew impatient, she said unwillingly—

"'Agda is gone with M. Dahlström to take a sketch in the park.'

"'And why didn't you go with them?' asked her father, knitting his brows.

"'Because they don't like me to be with them when they sketch.'

"He did not say a word more, but taking his hat from the table, went straight down into the park.

"There he found the young couple sitting side by side, building castles in the air for their future, and telling each other how deeply they loved.

"The father's anger it would be impossible to describe; but for Agda, who threw herself between the two men, fatal consequences might have been the result. As it

was, he took his daughter back to the house with him, and shutting the door of the library, told the trembling girl that she must give up her lover at once, that he would never consent to her union with such a scoundrel, &c., and that if she dared try to see him again he would disinherit her for ever, and never see her again. The next morning he returned with his family to Forsvik, and ordered his steward to leave his service immediately.

"The autumn at Forsvik was dull and miserable; peace seemed to have fled from the place, and in its stead sorrow and unkindness to reign. The father was cold and severe to the child whom he had hitherto loved with all the tenderness of his heart and soul, and she began to look pale and thin, and to lose her brightness and merriment of manner.

"To crown her troubles, Carl came to Forsvik on a long visit. Nina told him of all that had happened between August and Agda, and he immediately entreated her father to insist upon her marrying him immediately.

"'I am ashamed of my daughter,' said old Von Harlén, sternly; 'but if you still wish to marry her, and make her your wife, you have my consent. I will compel her to submit to my authority. She ought to feel honoured, after such disgraceful conduct, by your demand.'

"He sent for Agda, and told her his wish that she should marry her mother's cousin without delay.

"The poor girl assured her father that she never could, and never would, love any one else but August Dahlström, and

that unless she married him, she would remain as she was.

"'Very well,' said her father, angrily. 'You may have a month to make up your mind in. You either marry Carl, or—you leave my house.'

"When the day arrived on which she was to give her final answer to her father, she was nowhere to be found. She had fled from her father's roof——"

Here the captain paused. Not one of his listeners seemed inclined to interrupt the silence, which lasted for some minutes. At last, in a subdued voice, he continued—

"I have forgotten, in telling you so much about August Dahlström, to mention a person who played a very important part in the future fate of poor Agda, I mean Aron Bromér."

Lord Casterton, on hearing this name, said with some excitement—

"Yes, yes, I want to hear about him."

"He was the son of a poor widow," continued the captain, "who worked late and early to give him an education, but she died before she had the sorrow of knowing that her son turned out badly. He had a great passion for play, and when quite a young man gave himself up to the pursuit of this dangerous and ruinous inclination. Chance so far had favoured him, and he began to have dreams of some day arriving at great riches by means of this engrossing amusement. He was engaged at this time as one of the clerks in Herr von Harlén's counting-house. He performed his duties well enough during the day, but at night he gave

hours from his sleep to continue his favourite game of biribi.

"At last luck turned against him; but instead of immediately giving up this hazardous pursuit, he went on and on, till he had not only spent every penny of his own earnings, but he took money from his employers and lost that—was found out, and turned away. Herr von Harlén had compassion on him, his first offence, and his youth, and refrained from prosecuting him.

"Bromér managed to obtain a situation abroad, but his love of play he still indulged in, and by degrees he sank lower and lower, till he had hardly any means of subsisting at all. For a time he was marker in a gaming-house kept by M. d'Orbean in Paris. Of the rest of his career on the continent I know nothing;

all I can say is, that ten years after he had left Sweden he returned home so poor and broken down, that he had to beg his way from town to town, till he reached some distant relations whom he hoped would help him. These relations were M. Dahlström and family, the steward to Herr von Harlén.

"He arrived at Forsvik in a tattered and miserable condition, half starved, and ill from exhaustion and over-walking.

"Fröken Agda, who was then about fourteen, happened to see him when he arrived, and her kind heart was immediately touched at the sight of so much wretchedness and poverty.

"Her father was away, but she begged her aunt to allow the poor man to remain a few days on the estate and be properly fed and clothed. The first night he was

housed and comfortably fed he fell ill with a nervous fever, and for two months could not leave his bed, during which time Fröken Agda herself looked after him, and saw that he was properly nursed and cared for. He was just beginning to get a little better, when the master of Forsvik came home, and heard of the illness of this stranger. At first he was angry that an adventurer, whom no one knew anything about, had been lodged in his house during his absence. He went to see him, and order him to be sent to the poor-house on the estate, when he recognized his former clerk, whom he had turned away for stealing.

"Being himself a strictly honest man in all his business dealings, he was severe and unforgiving to those who acted contrariwise. As soon as he recognized Bro-

mér, he gave orders to have him instantly removed from his house. He would listen to nothing his sister or daughter said in the poor man's favour, but insisted that as soon as he could leave his bed he was to be sent away. He would not have a man of that character taken care of in his house.

"Poor Agda was distressed beyond measure at her father's severity towards her protégé, and she put on her hat and went to the pastor of the village, and begged him to help her and try and do something for the poor sick man.

"The kind old pastor, to please the young lady, went to see Bromér, and had a long talk with him, after which he promised Agda that he would give him the care of his garden for the winter. The work was light. Bromér thankfully ac-

cepted the kind offer, and Agda was satisfied with the result of her appeal to the old man who had taught her religion from the time she was able to speak.

"When Bromér was leaving Forsvik, and said good-bye to his kind protectress, he added in an earnest tone—

"'If ever in the course of your life, young lady, you want some one to sacrifice himself for you, *then* remember Aron Bromér.'

"He did his duty so well at the vicarage, that at the end of the winter the pastor begged him to remain, and offered him a good salary.

"Every Christmas and midsummer Agda sent Bromér a little present. She never forgot the man she had once been kind to, and she was glad that he stayed with her

old friend the parson, and made himself useful and necessary to him.

"The years passed on, and, as I told you, things had gone wrong at the Castle, and Fröken Agda had disappeared from Forsvik. A few days before this had happened Lotta had had an interview with Bromér in the park, during which he gave her a letter, and told her to put it at once into the hands of her young mistress.

"The letter was from August Dahlström, to tell her that he was staying for a few hours with Bromér, for the purpose of seeing her. He begged her to meet him in the park as soon as it was dark, for that he *must* see her again, he was so miserable at the thought of the way in which her father was treating her about her cousin Carl.

"Agda went to meet him at the hour appointed, and Bromér kept guard that no

one disturbed the lovers whilst they talked over their future, and discussed what was to be done. August succeeded in persuading Agda to leave her father's house, and follow him, rather than marry her hated cousin, Count Carl. The result of this conference was, that two days after she was nowhere to be found. Certain it is, that the enraged but sorrowful father would have forgiven and pardoned his daughter when he read the letter he received from her the day after, if it had not been for the cold-hearted Carl, who did everything in his power to enhance Herr von Harlén's anger and wounded pride against the poor girl who had been driven to this unfortunate step. Carl told him he ought never to forgive the disgrace brought on his family, that to take back to his heart, or pardon, the daughter who had thus volun-

tarily absconded from her father's roof, would be a proof of weakness he ought not to exhibit. He bade him think of the scandal, and how every one was talking of the disgraceful conduct of Agda, who had run away with her father's steward's son—and he poured into the old man's ear so many lies and hard things about this sudden act of Agda, that he drove him nearly mad. His sister threw herself on his bosom, and entreated him to forgive the poor girl, but he would listen to no one save Carl, and later on in the evening he answered his child's letter by saying that henceforth and for ever he disowned her. This unfeeling and unfatherly letter was followed a few days later by an announcement that she could receive the portion due to her from her mother as soon as she was married, but that she was to expect nothing

else from him, for not a farthing of his money should she have.

"When Agda received this letter and cruel announcement, she began to repent the hasty step she had taken. She immediately hastened to Forsvik to throw herself at the feet of her much-loved father and beg his forgiveness. But Carl told Von Harlén she was coming, and advised him not to see her. When she arrived she saw no one but Carl, who informed her that her father refused to see her, and that if she did not at once leave the house the servants had orders to put her by force outside the gates.

"Broken-hearted at this cruelty, she went in her trouble to her old friend the parson, and told him all her grief. The good old man was horrified at such unnatural conduct, and determined to reason

with Herr von Harlén, and beg him to receive his daughter back. He went to Forsvik, but the angry man would not receive him, and sent him a message by Carl that he could not see him. Carl's jealousy and disappointment made him do all in his power to prevent any reconciliation taking place between father and daughter.

"A day or two after the old priest's useless visit, he received a letter from Von Harlén, saying that henceforth and for ever he renounced his relationship with his daughter, and that he would have nothing to do with one who had disgraced him so bitterly. He begged him not to meddle in his family affairs, and as soon as possible to send the miserable Agda from the spot where her presence only increased the scandal already far too wide spread.

"The parson handed this letter to Agda

to read, and half an hour after the poor heart-broken girl left the vicarage, accompanied by Bromér, and returned to the lady who had housed her when she left her father's castle with August. A fortnight later, August Dahlström and Agda von Harlén were married in Copenhagen. Bromér gave up his situation with the old parson, and followed the young couple to Paris, where August intended studying, and carefully cultivating his artistic talent. The first six months of her married life Agda was so happy and contented that she forgot to grieve over the sorrow of her father's anger, but enjoyed to the full the pure and sweet delight of loving and being loved.

"Bromér was their servant and friend. He arranged everything for them, attended to their housekeeping, and managed their

money so well that he saved them more than half what they expected to be obliged to spend.

"One day Agda read in a Swedish paper an account of Major Carl's marriage to Nina von Harlén, and a little while after she received a letter from her aunt, in which the old lady informed her, with many expressions of regret, that upon Nina's wedding-day her father had made his will afresh, leaving all his money to his youngest daughter, Nina, and not even a blessing to the elder one.

"After this news, August often found Agda in tears. She seemed sorrowful and gloomy, and quite changed from his bright happy bride of six months ago. At first he tried to comfort her and coax her not to grieve over such unnatural conduct. But she could not restrain her tears, and in the

end August grew impatient, and began to show signs of annoyance that she could not be as happy now as she had been, with him still to love her.

"He gradually ceased to take an interest in his work, and when he saw his wife's pale cheeks and sad face, he reproached himself for having prevailed on her to leave her home and share his humble means with him. He, too, began to weary of Paris; and one day he proposed to his young wife that they should travel a little, and seek in change of air to bring back the colour to her cheeks.

"Accordingly they left Paris, and went to Baden-Baden. Here the young husband visited the green tables for the first time, in company with Bromér, who had been seized with a return of his old passion for gaming.

"Two months passed, and August had lost not only all the little capital belonging to his wife, but every penny of a sum of money his father had sent him a short time before.

"Ruin stared them in the face, and poor Agda upbraided her husband for his neglect and forgetfulness. But he would listen to nothing she said, and still went night after night to the place which seemed to fascinate him in spite of his continued ill-luck. In her agony, Agda appealed to Bromér, reminded him of his promise to her, of how he had vowed he would sacrifice himself for her sake, and yet it was him she had to thank for the disgrace and ruin which had fallen on them. The young wife's tears awoke in Bromér a consciousness of the harm he was doing, and made him feel ashamed of the ungrateful return he was

now giving for her past kindness and goodness to him when he was ill. He knew it was through him that August had been tempted to the gaming-tables, that every penny was spent, and that by his influence he had reduced the pale, unhappy girl to a state of utter destitution. That evening he went again to the tables, vowing to himself that if Fortune would favour him only this once, he would never again tempt her.

"He went, and after an hour's play he returned home. He had gained so much that he had enough to take them all back to Sweden, and pay off the debts owing in the place.

"With some difficulty, he persuaded August to leave Baden-Baden, and to turn his steps northward.

"When old Mr. Dahlström left Timasjö,

he had rented a little farm in the neighbourhood of Stockholm; and here it was that Bromér advised August to shelter his young wife while he sought work and tried to earn enough for them to live upon.

"A year after they left Sweden they returned home completely ruined.

"During the journey, August had had time for reflection. He felt how cruelly and selfishly he had acted towards his young wife, and came to the unwise conclusion that she could never forgive him for the trouble and sorrow he had caused her. But Agda was a warm-hearted and true woman. The more he lamented and grieved over his past faults, the more tender and loving in words and manner she became. She comforted him, and instilled courage into his failing heart, and bade him work so hard for both himself

and for her at his art, that in time he could win renown and fame, and rise to be one of the greatest men of the day.

"Ah! she was a noble forgiving woman, and worthy a better husband!"

For a moment the captain's voice was husky and broken, and he could not go on.

"If it pains you, captain, why tell us all these details?" said Lord Casterton, kindly; "make your story shorter, and tell us about Lady Casterton."

"But, my lord," resumed the captain, "unless I dwell on all these minute circumstances, you will not understand the part that refers to Lady Casterton."

"Well, say it your own way. I only wished to spare your feelings. I am very impatient for you to go on."

"So I will, my lord. The travellers

arrived at Stockholm, and were met at the station by old Mr. Dahlström. He looked stern and angry when he saw his son, but he embraced Agda very affectionately. He took them home, and, to Agda's delight and surprise, led her into a small suite of apartments, beautifully fitted up for her use, with every luxury her heart could desire. Here he took her in his arms again, and whispered to her that he would always be a loving father to her as long as she needed a protector and friend.

"Then he had a long talk with his son, in which he told him that he thought it was simply disgraceful, the way he had treated the girl who had sacrificed everything for his sake, and that he ought to work night and day to redeem the lost time, and by earnest, self-sacrificing devo-

tion, try and make up to his wife the harm and injury he had done her.

"August promised to do as his father wished, adding that he had already bitterly reproached himself for his past neglect of his angel wife.

"Shortly after her arrival at Skälby, Agda presented her husband with a little son, whose birth very nearly cost the mother her life.

"Mr. Dahlström immediately wrote to Herr von Harlén's sister, informed her of the birth of the child, and that Agda was so seriously ill, the doctors feared she would not recover.

"Aunt Malin was alone when this letter arrived. It touched her heart, and she carried it at once to her brother, and begged him to go and see his daughter and her little son.

"Old Von Harlén promised to think about it; but when he spoke, his voice was soft and tender, and his sister knew that in his heart he had decided to go. She left him, and two hours after she heard him giving orders to have his valise packed and a carriage to be ready the next morning very early, to take him to the railway station. Aunt Malin rejoiced, for she knew that this journey was to see his once loved child. But her joy was short.

"Late in the evening, Carl and his wife returned to the Castle. They had been away all day in Stockholm, and there they had heard the news of August Dahlström's return to Sweden. Carl related to his father-in-law that August had played away all Agda's money in Baden-Baden, and was now idling about the streets of Stockholm like a vagabond. That Agda was staying

with her father-in-law, and that she expected, no doubt, her own father to support her, now she was in distress at the loss of her money.

"Aunt Malin was not present when Carl talked in this way to Von Harlén, but she knew that he had again set the father's heart against his child, when she heard the journey for the next morning had been postponed.

"At breakfast, Von Harlén said to his sister, with a frown on his brow,

"'Send *her* this money from yourself, *not* from me. And, mark this, Malin, if you mention *her* name to me again, you and I must separate.' And he laid a note for 1000 rix-dalers on the table, and left the room.

"Dear old Aunt Malin sent the money, with a grieving and broken heart.

"In a few days, old Mr. Dahlström re-

turned it to Herr von Harlén, saying that it was not money that Agda needed, but the love and affection of her father, and that she would not receive the one without the other.

"Agda recovered, and the little son was a joy to both father and mother. August worked hard from morning till evening, and peace seemed at last to have returned to the young couple. Lotta, too, had found her way to her old mistress, and had begged to be allowed to have the charge of the young boy. Agda was delighted to have her, and old Mr. Dahlström engaged her as nurse to his grandson.

"And in peace and quiet joy in the happy little homestead a year fled away.

"Then came sorrow again. The child died, after a few days' illness, and with his

death everything seemed to go wrong. The animals on the farm died of an epidemic prevalent in the district. The bank in which Herr Dahlström had placed his money ceased payment, and the rent was due, and could not be paid. The winter was a sad one for the kind, hospitable old man; and August, who had been working hard to finish a large picture, in the hopes of keeping his father by its sale out of his present difficulties, saw, day after day, and week after week, go by, and no one came forward with the intention of buying it.

"Things had arrived at their very worst, when, one day, August met an old companion of his—a caricature painter, called David. In the course of conversation, David asked what was the cause of his dejected looks, and it didn't require much

persuasion for August to tell the history of the trouble at the farm.

"'It pains me to the heart that I cannot sell my picture; for unless money enough is raised to pay the rent, the old father must leave the farm in the autumn; and I don't see where the money is to come from,' he added, with a bitter sigh.

"'If that is all, I can soon help you, and show you a way to make plenty of money, provided you have courage for the undertaking,' was the prompt reply of David.

"August's was a disposition that did not like hard work. He was too impulsive to sit patiently day after day and go on with his duty, unless it brought quickly the reward he aimed at. It was this impatience of nature which had brought him so much trouble already. He had thrown his whole energies into gaming, simply because the

end was quickly accomplished, and he lost or won as soon as the numbers were decided. For his wife's sake, he had given up that hazardous mode of subsistence, and for a whole year had patiently worked day after day, in the hope of gaining money. Now trouble had come to them, and his ardent nature seized greedily this hope of making a fortune quickly as a compensation for his disappointment in not selling his picture, and he agreed hastily to David's proposal.

"In a very short time, August had money at his disposal. He bought many things that were needed in the house, and he promised his father that when the time came for the payment of the rent, he would have it ready for him without fail. The old man was pleased at the earnestness of his son, and was glad that he succeeded so well at last in the support of his family.

"In the beginning of July, August asked his father if he would allow David to have the use of a couple of small rooms, which were in a kind of wing of the farm-house, and rarely used. David, he said, wished to be in the country for a time, and would willingly pay for occupying the unused rooms. The old man made no objection, and accordingly David took up his residence in them. There he and August worked hard from early morning till late at night. When asked what they were doing, August replied that they were illustrating a great book that was to be published at Christmas.

"Agda often remarked that her husband looked ill and worn, and tried to persuade him not to work so late, but every time she remonstrated with him he gave her an impatient answer, and seemed to be nervous and irritable with every one.

"One day Bromér paid them an unexpected visit. Neither August nor Agda had seen him since he left them at the station on their return from abroad. He was nicely dressed and looked well, and said he had only come to see how the young couple were getting on. Agda asked him what he had been doing lately since they had seen him, to which he replied, he was clerk to a contractor.

"He had a long talk with August, and when he was going, he advised Mr. Dahlström to send David away as soon as possible, that very day even, if it could be managed.

"'I don't know what he has done,' said Bromér, 'but the police seem to be watching him; and if he has anything to hide he ought not to be here, he might bring trouble on all of you.'

"These words made old Mr. Dahlström uneasy, and that same evening he told David to go. He went early next morning, and from that time, August ceased working in the wing of the farm.

"A few days later, August asked his wife to go with him to Stockholm, to fetch his payments for his work. He told her and his father that he hoped henceforth to be much better off, and seemed in such good spirits that Agda was delighted. She had so rarely lately seen him smile.

"It was a beautiful, clear, November day, when the young couple left Skälby, and entered Stockholm. August led his wife to a tidy, pretty little room, which he said he occupied when his work obliged him to stay in town over night.

"They had not been there long, before the landlady—coming into the room—called

August Herr Fries. Agda could not understand this, and asked her husband anxiously the reason for such a strange mistake. 'It's a whim of mine, dear,' he answered; 'I am drawing a set of caricatures which are to be out soon, and I don't want the people of the house to know who I am, so I told them that I was called Fries.'

"In the afternoon, August gave Agda a 500 rix-daler note, and told her to pay a bill for him of 50 rix-dalers, and to give him the 450 dalers of change. She did as he bade her.

"The next morning he ordered a closed carriage, and they both went out to make various purchases necessary for winter. They drove to Vesterlång Street, and the carriage stopped opposite a large linen-draper's. August gave Agda a note of 500 rix-dalers, and said :

"'While you are getting what you want, I will do some business of my own, the cab can wait for you, and if I am not back by the time you have finished, then drive home and don't wait.'

"When Agda went into the shop, she met Bromér. She spoke a few kind words to him, and then went forward to the counter to look at some material for a dress. She chose what she required, and whilst she was waiting to have her purchase packed up, she noticed a slight, rather gray man paying a bill a few feet from her. Their eyes met, and she recognized her cousin Carl. She turned hastily away, and handed the shopman the note her husband had given her.

"'500 rix-dalers is a large sum to change,' said the man. 'Have you nothing less?'

"'No,' stammered Agda, who was very

agitated at meeting her cousin in this unexpected manner.

"'Don't take a 500 rix-daler note without well examining it,' exclaimed Carl, pretending not to know Agda. 'Only yesterday two false notes of the same sum were discovered at the bank.'

"Agda shuddered as she saw the man raise the note to the light, and in an instant there flashed through her mind the secret work in the wing, Bromér's warning about David, and her husband's anxious, worried expression. Without knowing why she did it, she turned suddenly to the door and whispered to Bromér, who still stood there:

"'Save August, for God's sake!'

"The words had barely escaped her lips, when one of the shopmen sprang over the counter and closed the doors, shutting out Bromér who was lounging on the step.

"The examination of the note had proved it a forged one.

"Agda was asked how she got the note, who she was, and if she knew it was forged.

"Carl stood by listening. One word of his would have saved her this scene; if he had simply said, 'This lady is my cousin, and daughter of Herr von Harlén,' the shopman, who knew him well, would have held his tongue, and allowed Agda to pass out unmolested. But such a proceeding would have spoiled all Cousin Carl's future plans, and like the despicable wretch he was, he said nothing, only smiled contentedly to himself, and let the shopman send for the police.

"To every question that was put to her, the ashy-pale young wife gave no answer; it seemed as if her power of speech had fled.

She was put into the cab still waiting at the door, and two policemen drove back with her to the little room she and her husband were occupying. There the men found several other notes of the same kind, all forged, and in consequence they carried the young wife off to prison."

"'What a scoundrel Carl was," exclaimed Lord Casterton, half rising from his chair.

"Ah, you may well say so," said the captain, grinding his teeth. Then going over to his father-in-law, he laid his hand heavily on his shoulder, and hoarsely whispered:

"And what do you think of such dastardly conduct, Count Stangenskjöld? Don't you think he deserved punishing? I'm sure you would judge him severely. I know that when I heard that story for the first time, I thought to myself, if *I* ever

meet him he will get his deserts; and yet that is only the beginning of his infamy."

The captain took his hand from the count's shoulder, and began walking up and down the room to calm himself.

Martha sat very still, but her large eyes were fixed in mournful intensity on her father; they seemed to long to tell him, that no matter what sorrow was in store for him, she would comfort and shield him with her love. She would care for him, even if she was obliged to despise him. She sighed, but said nothing.

Presently the captain went to the table, poured himself out some brandy and water, drank it slowly, then folding his arms, he added:

"Yes, you may well say he was a scoundrel, my lord, but what will you think when I tell you that this Cousin

Carl was, and is, no other than Count Stangenskjöld sitting over there. I can keep it in no longer, for I abhor and despise the man, and he knows it, and—"

"Count Stangenskjöld the Cousin Carl you speak of!" exclaimed Lord Casterton; "surely not your wife's father?"

A groan from where Martha sat, burying her head in her hands, was all the answer this exclamation received for a few moments, but after a while the captain replied:

"I am ashamed to confess that my wife's father *is* the heartless wretch I have called Cousin Carl."

Then resuming his seat, he quietly went on:

"Whilst the questioning was going forward in the shop, Bromér, without appearing to notice Agda's words, hastened up the street to where he hoped to meet or find

August coming out of a café; he fortunately met him. Whispering to him to follow quickly, he led him to a secluded doorway, and there said:

"'Your wife is detained; the notes are forged; she bade me save you, and tell you to fly.'

"'But Agda?' mumured August.

"'Fly, I say!' persisted Bromér, 'her father will save her. I will start for Timasjö at once. If you are caught then all is lost. Fly, for God's sake!'

"August said not a word more, but went quickly down to the quay, where the steamer for Lübeck was just on the point of starting. He went on board, and in a few minutes steamed out of the town.

"David had already left Stockholm a week before.

"Bromér kept his word, and after seeing

August safely off, went immediately to Timasjö. He did not imagine that Herr von Harlén would hesitate to clear the imputation cast on his miserable child, but Bromér was mistaken.

"Cousin Carl had already reached Timasjö, and related to the old man, Von Harlén, with many expressions of regret and sorrow, that Agda had fallen so low as to have become the accomplice of her husband's guilt, and to pay away the notes she knew he had falsely fabricated.

"The old man was shocked beyond measure at such daring wickedness, and when Bromér arrived to beg him to help his unhappy child, he sternly and peremptorily refused to have anything to say to her, or to aid her with his influence in any way, although Bromér told him that she expected to be confined every day.

Von Harlén shut the door in his face, and would not allow him to have an interview with Fröken Malin.

"In the meantime Agda had been taken to prison, and there interrogated as to her name and home. She would answer nothing, and the only information the officers in charge of her could gain, was from the woman of the house where August had hired the room: she only knew that the unfortunate lady was called Fries, and came from Strengnäs. A few letters were found directed to A. Fries, Strengnäs, amongst a lot of papers; but where the man Fries was himself, no one seemed to have any idea.

"The next day, the superintendent of police had an anonymous letter, informing him of August's real name and address, and that he had escaped by the steamer which left the day previously.

"A few days later on, poor Agda gave birth to a daughter within the prison walls, and an hour or two after she died.

"The faithful Lotta had succeeded in being admitted to her mistress in her hour of pain and sorrow; and Bromér also had seen her once after his fruitless visit to her father. It was during this one and only conversation with the poor unhappy girl, that he promised to shield and care for her child, and never to let Cousin Carl have anything to do with it, but to bring it up in ignorance of its mother's miserable end, and its father's wretched crime. In making this promise, and in giving his word to keep her wishes sacred, Bromér knew better than Agda, that her own father would never acknowledge the child of a forger as his grandchild.

"My lord," added the captain in a broken

voice, turning to Edwin, "that child, born under those miserable, unhappy circumstances—was Lady Casterton."

Lord Casterton made no comment; but buried his face in his hands, as the captain continued:

"Lotta took the baby from its mother's arms, and in her turn, promised to watch over the child, and never let her know the disgrace of her parents, or the origin of her birth. The poor mother died, praying God to forgive her husband for all the misery he had caused.

"Fröken Malin arrived too late to see her niece alive. She had heard from her brother an account of what had happened respecting the false note, and judging rightly, that Carl had wilfully misrepresented Agda's share in the affair, she entreated Von Harlén to retract his harsh determination,

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and to do what he could to release his daughter from her degrading position. But finding him resolved to abide by Cousin Carl's advice, she left his house in indignation at his unnatural decision, and went to an hotel in Stockholm. But all she could do, was to succeed in having poor Agda buried in the secluded and picturesque little churchyard at Solna, by the side of her father-in-law, old Mr. Dahlström, who had succumbed to an apoplectic fit, brought on by the shock of hearing of his son's forgery. She raised a simple monument to her niece's memory and mourned for her deeply.

"So long as she lived, she daily visited the little orphan, and looked after her comfort as much as lay in her power. She wrote to her brother informing him of its fate, and how the man he had once turned away in disgrace from his office, was now

supporting his grandchild, the offspring of his daughter Agda. She finished her letter by writing:

"'This disgraced Broméer said to me, "The father's crime has deprived the child of a name, and her grandfather has taken from her his fortune, but, unlikely as it now appears, *I*, the poor, disgraced clerk and gamester, will not descend to my grave, till I have given back to Agda—Von Harlén's daughter—both the wealth and rank she has been deprived of."'

"This letter, as well as many others, never reached Von Harlén's hands. They were abstracted from the letter-bag by Carl the moment they arrived, and when Von Harlén some time after bade him inquire after the child's welfare, he satisfied the old man by assuring him that the child must have died soon after the mother, for that

nothing more had been heard of it. Fröken Malin's letters he returned unopened, and in time she ceased writing.

"Six months later, Aunt Malin died, and with her death the last link was broken which united Von Harlén to his grandchild.

"Carl rejoiced, for he could now play his game unhindered.

"The next year, Herr von Harlén left Sweden, handing over Timasjö Castle and grounds to his son-in-law, and leaving Forsvik to be rented to strangers.

"In the meantime August had succeeded in escaping to England, where his sister had lived for many years.

"Caroline Dahlström had gone to England as governess in a Swedish family, but had married an Englishman, the steward and agent of the property belonging to the

Marchioness Brissier. The well-educated and sweet-looking Caroline was a great favourite with the marchioness, who made her her daily companion whenever she was at Harton Court; and between the two ladies there was a sincere and affectionate friendship. Caroline told the marchioness of her brother's marriage, and read to her the letters she received from her father relative to August's gaming away Agda's little fortune, and the return home of the young couple in a destitute condition. After a time August wrote to her very often himself, and described his wife as so beautiful and winsome, that Caroline grew interested in her unknown sister-in-law, and all that concerned her.

"Time passed on, and she received no letters from her native land. She began to grow uneasy at this prolonged silence, when

one day she had put in her hand a black-edged envelope directed in a strange hand. On opening it, she read a simple notification of her father's and sister-in-law's deaths, signed by A. Bromér, and without any details or account of how the sad events had happened. She wrote immediately in great distress to Sweden, begging to know more of this unexpected and sudden bereavement; but before she could receive any reply, the unhappy cause of the sorrow presented himself to her notice.

"It was a dark, stormy afternoon in the autumn, when August knocked at Harton Court, and asked for his sister.

"She had not seen him for eight years, not since he was a lad of sixteen, and she found it very difficult to recognize in the moustached, sad-looking man, the beardless, bright boy she had left at home.

He had walked a long distance, scarcely tasted food for days, and was altogether in a very sorry plight. She listened with a beating heart and cheeks hot with shame, while he confessed to her the history and true cause of his flight from their native land, and his penniless condition, of how at her earnest request he had left his wife, that he might find safety in a foreign country, and that he knew not what she might now be suffering in consequence of his fatal error.

"When he had finished the history of his disgrace and shame, Caroline confided the whole to her friend the marchioness, asking her advice as to what she should do in the emergency.

"'Let him stay here for a time, and I will see what I can do to help him for your sake, my dear,' was the consoling reply of the true-hearted lady.

"And for several weeks he remained at Harton Court, during which time he heard of the generous conduct of Bromér towards his child, and of the death of his wife and father.

"And *he* was the cause of his wife's early death, and of his old father's sudden departure from life! Even the strongest natures cannot bear such fearful consequences to follow their crimes on those they love, without giving way under the grief, and the result was that August was seized with brain fever, and very nearly followed his wife to the grave. He recovered, and as soon as he was strong enough declared his intention of going to France, and joining as a volunteer in the French war in Algiers.

"By the marchioness's interest through Lord William Casterton, he obtained a post

among the troops about to embark for the African continent. But ere he started, he thanked his noble hostess for her generosity and kindness to him, and swore to her that he would not put foot on his native soil again or see his child till he had by his honourable life and some worthy deed atoned for the crime he had been thoughtlessly led to commit. To which the marchioness replied:

"'I have endeavoured to forward your interests, because I think you will henceforth strive to lead a noble life. You are young, and in wishing for more money than you earned you were tempted to do wrong. *Now* it is in your power to make those who belong to you, forget that sin through your high and noble deeds, and to give to your little daughter some day, a name and a father to be proud of.'

"In France I learned to know Dahlström, together we went to Algiers, and there fought side by side on the battle-field.

"Three years later on, I read in the Swedish papers, that the young forger, August Dahlström, after fighting bravely and doing many noble actions, had fallen and died.

"I was by his side when he fell, and it was to me he gave the duty of revenging Agda's wrongs. I accepted the strange bequest, and I think I am fulfilling my trust as conscientiously as possible.

"Now it remains for me to relate what had become of those who survived him. I hope my story is not too long, my lord, and that it does not weary you?" asked the captain, suddenly stopping short in his narrative and walking up to his blind host.

"It interests me so deeply I have not

words to thank you for your kindness in telling it," said Lord Casterton earnestly. "Pray go on."

"Well! you remember I told you that Herr von Harlén had gone abroad? He had settled down in Italy, taken another name, and lived very simply with only one servant to wait on him. He rarely wrote home, and when he did write, his letters were merely on business matters.

"One day, about a year after Elvira had left school, Cousin Carl had a visit from Von Harlén's agent in Sweden. He had received a letter he said from Von Harlén, ordering him to find out every possible information respecting Herr Bromér and his daughter; and for this purpose he had come to Carl, as Von Harlén had desired his son-in-law to help in obtaining the required information.

"The agent discovered all he could, and that the old-clothesman with his daughter had just left Paris to visit the German baths at Wiesbaden.

"Carl was uneasy at this strange interest of Von Harlén's in his long-neglected granddaughter, and began to wonder what it could all mean, and if it would affect his future possession of the old man's money; and he determined to be on the spot and judge for himself. Accordingly he made his wife's delicate health an excuse, and travelled with his family to Wiesbaden; but he only intended staying there long enough to find out if Von Harlén was himself there, and had had any personal interview with Bromér for the purpose of reinstating Agda's daughter in her birthright.

"He had not been there many days, when he read in the list of strangers, that Bromér

and his daughter were there; but as yet he had seen no sign of his father-in-law's presence in the town.

"One morning he went to the library to look over the papers, when he noticed an old man angrily dash a paper he was reading aside, and exclaim in Swedish, 'What an atrocious lie!' as he rose up and left the room. Cousin Carl snatched up the discarded journal, and hastened after the old gentleman, for in that moment he had recognized his father-in-law, Von Harlén.

"Cousin Carl hurried after the old man, and with well-feigned surprise, expressed his astonishment at meeting him, and asked if he had received the letter he had written concerning Agda Dahlström's child. Von Harlén of course answered he had not received it; for a very good reason too, inas-

much as it had never been written; but that didn't hinder Carl from asserting that the contents of it were to the effect that Agda's daughter ought to have some help, and that he had begged his father-in-law to have mercy on his grandchild, and send her all she needed. While he was urging this false pity, he asked Von Harlén if he had seen the list of the last week's visitors; and hearing that he had not, Carl immediately determined to carry out a plan, which chance thus rendered more feasible than he had hoped for. Finding that Von Harlén had come to Wiesbaden for the express purpose of gaining information about his granddaughter, Carl told him that Bromér and his foster-child had really been there, but had already left the town, as Bromér had played away almost the füll amount of his acquired fortune. 'And,' added Carl,

'if you had not opportunely arrived, I meant to have travelled back to Sweden and forcibly taken Agda's daughter away from the man who has proved himself so unworthy of his trust, for I grieve to think the girl should be subject to such bad influences as she has around her.'

"Herr von Harlén was completely deceived by his son-in-law's pretended interest in the lonely girl, and he promised to rescue her from Bromér's hands and publicly acknowledge her as his grandchild. It only required this declaration on the part of the old man, to decide Carl to carry out his wicked intentions. His father-in-law's fortune he had for years regarded as his own; should he lose it at the last moment, just because of the old man's capricious whim to atone for past harshness by reinstating the girl in her rights? No, not if he could

help it; cost what it would, *that* should never happen.

"Von Harlén informed Carl that he should start for Sweden at once, if what he said was true, that Bromér was to be found there.

"Carl tried to persuade him to stay in Wiesbaden and see his daughter Nina.

"'No, I won't,' was the answer, 'I am not over pleased with Nina, it was she who *first* turned against her sister. No, no, I won't stay; but tell her from me that the journals have written false accounts. It was my servant, and not me who was murdered.'

"'Murdered! was that in the paper?' said Carl, thoughtfully, as a gleam of sardonic satisfaction spread over his face.

"Early the next morning, Carl went to Von Harlén's hotel, and begged to be

allowed to go with him back to Sweden. 'My wife must go on with her bathing, I have nothing to do, and perhaps I can be of use to you, if Bromér is unwilling to give up your grandchild,' he urged, and the old man, nothing loath to have a companion, agreed to the proposal, and the two started by the next train.

"Fifteen years of sorrow and remorse had changed the fine-looking, handsome man of fifty-eight, into a white-haired, infirm and stooping old man of seventy-three."

"In France I learned to know Dahlström, together we went to Algiers, and there fought side by side on the battle-field.

"Three years later on, I read in the Swedish papers, that the young forger, August Dahlström, after fighting bravely and doing many noble actions, had fallen and died.

"I was by his side when he fell, and it was to me he gave the duty of revenging Agda's wrongs. I accepted the strange bequest, and I think I am fulfilling my trust as conscientiously as possible.

"Now it remains for me to relate what had become of those who survived him. I hope my story is not too long, my lord, and that it does not weary you?" asked the captain, suddenly stopping short in his narrative and walking up to his blind host.

"It interests me so deeply I have not

words to thank you for your kindness in telling it," said Lord Casterton earnestly. "Pray go on."

"Well! you remember I told you that Herr von Harlén had gone abroad? He had settled down in Italy, taken another name, and lived very simply with only one servant to wait on him. He rarely wrote home, and when he did write, his letters were merely on business matters.

"One day, about a year after Elvira had left school, Cousin Carl had a visit from Von Harlén's agent in Sweden. He had received a letter he said from Von Harlén, ordering him to find out every possible information respecting Herr Bromér and his daughter; and for this purpose he had come to Carl, as Von Harlén had desired his son-in-law to help in obtaining the required information.

depend upon his secrecy and fidelity. As soon as he had led his father-in-law to an inner room, he shut the door and harshly told him that he was a prisoner, and his life would be forfeited if he attempted to communicate with the outer world, or to make any disturbance. The window was heavily barred outside; the old man was helpless, and Carl heartlessly locked him in, bade the old soldier give him food, and then left the house.

"Returning to town, he had an account of Herr von Harlén's murder in his Italian residence, published in the Swedish papers, and of the disappearance of his only servant no one knew where, and as the old man had not travelled in his own name through Germany, the story was believed by all who saw it.

"Nina read the announcement, and the

shock hastened the death which had been hovering near her for some time. She died in Copenhagen on the road home, without again seeing her husband. A few days before, she called Carl Brogren to her bedside, and bade him remind her husband of the duty he owed to Agda's child, and that he ought to divide the property between the cousins.

"It was this knowledge which gave Carl Brogren so much power over Nina's husband.

"Two years later I came to Sweden, and sought out Lotta, Agda's faithful lady's-maid and friend, in order to make myself acquainted with all concerning Agda, and to carry out the last wishes of my companion in arms, August Dahlström.

"I had already managed to have an interview with Bromér on Elvira's wedding-

day, and he had given me an opportunity of beholding for one short moment the orphan child of my dead friend. Her beautiful face and sweet expression interested me so deeply, that I at once made up my mind to leave no stone unturned to place her in the position she had a claim to, and to restore her to her natural rights. To this end I sought Lotta.

"From her I learned that Cousin Carl never left the house and grounds of the little property I have already mentioned to you, and that he had sold Timasjö.

"I already hated the man for his dastardly conduct to my friend's darling wife, and I thought I would try and find out the reason for his strange seclusion in this solitary house. I knew there must be some secret, and for weeks I carefully watched everything that went on without being seen myself.

"The people in the neighbourhood said that he wandered about the place night and day like a ghost; that he fancied every servant was a thief, and that he guarded the house at night by walking around it whilst others slept. The old soldier, Flink, was the only man allowed in his room. By means of bribery and a pure accident, I got Flink to confess that one night Cousin Carl had arrived in company with an old man, who had ever since remained in the house. I immediately on hearing this information left Sweden, and travelled post-haste to Italy. I made inquiries, and discovered that Von Harlén had not been murdered, as was reported in the papers, and from this and several other reflections, I came to the conclusion that the poor old gentleman was forcibly detained prisoner in Carl's house, to answer

some secret and fiendish purpose of his own.

"It was this knowledge, and the use I have made of it, which has enabled me to revenge to a certain degree Agda's outcast existence, and given me the power I have obtained over Cousin Carl's own freedom and honour, and, alas! only too late the liberty of the old man who from years of solitary confinement and harsh treatment, has become childish, and entirely lost his senses.

"In the meantime I thought it well to present this poor, broken down, disgracefully-wronged old man as *my* father. By doing so I saved a great deal of scandal. I brought him forth from his room—the living grave, where he has resided for several years—and I allowed the few people who have seen him the last three or four

weeks to believe he stands in this relationship to me.

"In spite of his childishness, he has a strong hankering desire to see his grandchild, and have her rights acknowledged; but, alas for his hopes! she is dead, and he will never bless her, and take her in his arms, and kiss her, as he did a short while ago, the only child of his daughter Nina."

Martha uttered a low sound in her throat as if gasping for breath, and her hand clutched convulsively the edge of the table, but she did not speak. She lowered her head, and after a moment grew still and quiet as death.

Lord Casterton rose up, and with one hand on the bandage over his eyes, with the other he grasped the back of his chair.

"But that is not all, surely you have more to say, captain," he exclaimed, somewhat hastily.

"Not much, my lord," replied Captain Ström, "only a few words to clear up a mistake which arose regarding a visit your wife made the day before you went to the Crimea. But what matters such a small affair now? She is gone from this earth, and all these things may be buried in her grave. Here is a letter which you ought to have received long ago, but which was unfortunately opened and concealed from you by some underhand proceeding. It was written by Sir Sidney Lembourn a few hours before he fought the duel which caused his death, and was to have been delivered to you immediately after the fatal encounter."

Captain Ström tendered the letter with

its broken seal to Lord Casterton, and glanced at his wife for the first time since he had begun to speak.

She had bowed her head so low that it almost touched the table, and her face was hidden in her handkerchief.

Captain Ström had found this letter amongst a number of her papers which he had insisted upon looking over soon after their marriage.

"And now let me assure you, Lord Casterton," continued the captain, slowly and emphatically, "that Elvira never loved any one but you; her whole heart was devoted to you, and she loved you with a strong, deep affection. The day you and she parted that last time, she had received in the morning a note from Fredrik Brogren, begging her to go to Altorp, and hear the true history of her birth and parentage, in

answer to her expressed wish that he should find it out for her if he could.

"She went to Altorp, and in the garden she heard from Fredrik's lips that her father had fabricated false notes, and that her mother for love of him had aided in the disposal of them, had been arrested for the crime, and died in prison at the birth of her child. It was to hear this sad history, my lord, that your wife went to Altorp, although I believe it was hinted to you that her presence there arose from a very different motive. A few hours before, you had gone to Skoggard to talk over a letter my wife sent you in reference to Lady Casterton's birth. But what passed between you and your wife on your return I know not. The result of that conversation was your journey to the Crimea. I am very much afraid that my wife, in her

anxiety to inform you of the miserable circumstances connected with Lady Casterton's parents, has a great deal to answer for as regards that last separation between you and your lady——"

"No, no, captain," interrupted Edwin, "the information Madame Ström was good enough to supply me with was quite superfluous, for I had already learned from my aunt, the Marchioness Brissier, the whole history of my wife's parentage. Indeed, if you remember, madam," added Lord Casterton, turning round to where Martha sat, and addressing her personally, "the purpose which led me to Skoggard that morning was to inform you that the birth of my wife was already known to me, and *I* took the liberty of adding the finishing touch to your letter, by telling you that you and Lady Casterton were cousins——"

"Faith, my dear wife, you never told me that!" exclaimed the captain, sternly; "we will say nothing more on that subject—but——"

Martha slowly raised her head and replied proudly, as her eyes flashed, and her lips quivered with mortification,

"Had you asked me, I would have told you, but you preferred finding out what you wished to know in a less dignified manner—and——"

"Martha, listen to me a moment longer, and I have done," interrupted the captain, without any ceremony. "I told you once that I loved Elvira Casterton, that for her sake, to free her from your plottings and intrigues against her happiness, I had married you—that——"

"Oh! I have heard enough to-day, I can bear no more!" cried Martha, raising

her hands with an imploring gesture to her husband, and a sob escaped her which told the agony she was enduring was beyond her control. "Spare me a repetition of——"

"Spare you, Martha? Did you spare Elvira? I told you that the happiness of Lady Casterton was dearer to me than life," he went on, relentlessly, "and I meant it; but you did not understand why, and I would not enlighten you. You have heard that I accepted the legacy of revenging her wrongs from her dying father, and I think now that I have fulfilled my trust, for, listen, Martha, that we may understand each other once and for ever. The man, *Arvid Ström*, died in the battle, and August Dahlström took his name. Do you understand, Martha? It is *I* who was Agda's husband; *I* who forged the notes, and allowed my wife to be punished

for my crime. *I*, and no other, am the wicked forger—August Dahlström—and husband to you, the proud, beautiful, and *nobly* born Martha Stangenskjöld!"

"*You?* August Dahlström?" she hissed through her clenched teeth, as with extended arms, and rigid, pale face, she confronted him in her overwhelming agony and terrible distress. "Oh, God! my punishment is heavy, and yet I repented the misery I caused!" she moaned.

"Yes, I am August Dahlström, and the father to that sweet woman whom you tried to wrong so deeply," he went on, regardless of her beseeching attitude. "Do you wonder now that I loved her? And yet," he added, in a softer tone, "now that she is dead, I would love you, Martha, if you would let me, if——" he stopped suddenly, and going to his wife, laid his

hand on her shoulder. "Bear with me a few minutes longer, and I have done," he added. "Now you know who I am, I will tell you who Mrs. Brow is. She is my sister Caroline, and Elvira's aunt, of course, and it was the Marchioness Brissier who suggested to Lord Casterton to give her as a companion to his young wife, that she might have at least one person around her who was true and disinterested, and attached to the family. It was Caroline who discovered Elvira's unfortunate intention of appearing in public as a singer, in time to inform Lord Casterton of the meditated act, and it was she who opened my eyes to the plottings and intrigues which the jealousy of two or three women were weaving around her, and it was she who, faithful to the end, followed Elvira to the Crimea, when she determined to share her husband's

danger, or die with him. She died, poor girl, and her bitter, short life, was sacrificed. She gave her husband back his freedom—but——"

"He does not want it; he loved his wife," exclaimed Lord Casterton excitedly. "She is not dead!" and with one hand tearing off the black bandage across his eyes, with the other he snatched aside the curtains of the middle window, and taking the young, charmingly dressed woman standing there in his arms, he brought her out into the room, exclaiming, "See! look at her! she is not dead, but lives to defy her enemies and love——"

"Elvira!" shrieked Martha, as she stared with fear and astonishment at the sudden apparition before them, and then fell back in her chair in a fainting fit.

For a moment no one noticed her, as

Edwin, drawing his wife to his bosom, went on.

"Ah, Marie! I recognized you the first moment you were near me, but I wanted to prove if you loved me as fondly as I loved you, and so I shammed this blindness, to learn the depth of the heart which now beats so close to mine. Darling, how I have longed for this hour!" he added, kissing her tenderly.

"My daughter!" said a voice hoarse with emotion, and in an instant Elvira raised her head from her husband's shoulder, and with a cry of delight threw herself into her father's arms, murmuring in a low whisper,

"Father and husband in one day! God is indeed good to give me both! Edwin, dear husband, know you now I love you?" she asked wistfully, as the colour deepened in her cheeks.

"Know it! Dear love, can I ever repay you all the suffering I have caused you?" and Edwin took his wife's hand in his, and looked in her face, as if he would never tire of gazing at what he saw there.

"Come, let us go," said Count Stangenskjöld, taking his daughter's lifeless arm, as if to make her move. Then seeing that she did not stir, he cried aloud, "Have I killed her, too?" and fell forward on the floor in a fit, with the froth oozing from the corners of his mouth.

CHAPTER XV.

NIGHT had spread her darkening wings over the earth.

In the room at Timasjö, where the Marchioness Brissier had breathed her last, lay now the Count Stangenskjöld. Martha and her husband, with the doctor, were watching by his bedside, but he was quite unconscious, and it was feared he would not recover. The fit had been a severe one; and even if he regained his senses, the doctor declared he would never be able to walk again, and perhaps not even to speak.

Towards morning he slightly opened his

eyes and feebly signed for something to drink. Then the anxious watchers by his bedside knew that his life was spared to him, and they retired to their rooms to try and sleep, leaving the old man in charge of the doctor.

"Martha," said Captain Ström, or Dahlström as he must henceforth be called, "Martha, you are my wife, I have righted Elvira, shall we not endeavour to live in peace and unity?"

He had led her into one of the guest chambers leading off the room her father occupied, and they were alone for the first moment since the terrible revelation of the previous afternoon. She did not answer; she was looking ill, and ten years older than she did a few hours before.

"Martha, can you not try to love me?

"Love you!" she exclaimed with a

shudder, "when you have killed my father!" and she pointed to the door of the next room.

"Do you know, Martha," he continued, unheeding her outcry, "that I will do all in my power to make you happy. I will try and be patient with you, and—"

"I care not what you do. I can never hold up my head again. You are cruel, cruel, and I hate you. Do you hear? I hate you although you are my husband," she cried out passionately, as she burst into tears and sobbed violently.

Poor Martha! her pride was humbled now, but her heart was hard as steel.

"Martha, will you try for a moment to think that *I* suffer as well as you? I pity you from my soul, indeed I do, but tears will avail nothing; try and bear your fate, and perhaps in time, God will have

mercy on you, and soften your heart towards me. Will you not let us be friends at least?" he asked gently, as he stooped over her. "We have both much to grieve over in our past," he went on, as she did not answer. "Let us learn a lesson from our sorrows, and make the best of our present unhappy position. You hate me now you say, but I hope in time to teach you to love me. For the sake of your father and grandfather, will you not try to make our home a peaceful one?"

Her sobs ceased, and she asked:

"Why do you speak of this now?"

"Because, unless we begin at once to condone and forgive each other's faults, to-morrow will—"

"I wish there were no to-morrow," she moaned, leaning her head against her chair.

"I am very sorry for you, Martha, more

sorry than you may think for, but will you do what I ask? You are very beautiful, and could make my home happy for me yet." And he looked at her with a strange yearning pity shining in his eyes.

She raised her head and caught his glance, and with an impulse she could not control, she put out her hand hesitatingly towards him. He took it, and murmured softly: "God forgive us both!"

And as the years passed on, these two —who had each in different ways sinned deeply and wilfully—learned to live in peace and serenity together, and in some measure to expiate and atone for much of the evil they had wrought, and thus obtain for themselves an inward satisfaction that brought in its train an outward and lasting happiness.

Lord and Lady Casterton left Timasjö,

handing it over as a gift to Elvira's father, as also all the fortune willed to her by Bromér.

Lotta received Altorp as a reward for all her devotion and affection to Elvira and her mother, but as long as Von Harlén lived, she stayed and nursed him at Timasjö.

"God has heard my prayer," said Lotta, "and let me live to see the day when my dear young mistress's child has been restored to her family and natural rights. I have nothing more to wish on this side heaven."

Von Harlén would not leave Timasjö. He preferred living with his son-in-law, Captain Dahlström, who had saved him from spending the remainder of his days in solitary confinement, and with whom he could sometimes talk of his favourite daughter, Agda.

Armida was still allowed to receive the pension Elvira had promised her, and as it was beyond her power to carry on any more intrigues to the detriment of her old schoolfellow, she threw her energies into the church, but whether for good or evil we will not undertake to say.

CHAPTER XVI.

THERE was grand rejoicing on the Casterton estate. Lord and Lady Casterton were returning to their country home for a sojourn of six or eight months.

The steward of the estate had received a letter from his lordship, informing him of the mistake of Lady Casterton's supposed death, and expressing a wish that everything should be arranged for his wife's reception worthy of her rank, and the welcome he hoped she would receive.

The September sun shone bright and

joyous, as the happy couple in carriage and four drove up to the entrance of Edwin's ancestral home. The tenantry had turned out to greet them, banners and flowers decorated the road, and the welcome Elvira received was as warm and hearty as her husband could wish. Tears of joy stood in her eyes, as she watched the smiling faces of her future dependents, and thought of the happiness in store for her within the walls of the home she was now entering under such bright and felicitous circumstances. A few hours later she entered the library, where, as Sœur Marie, she had so often sat and read to her patient. She took a low stool, and placing it by the side of her husband, sat down, and putting her elbows on his knees, looked up into his face. The expression she read there contained a whole world of affection and true manly

love. The sword-thrust had left its mark across the brow in a long deep furrow; but Elvira was proud of it, and looked at him with reverence, knowing that but for that ugly cut, the happiness she now enjoyed might never have been hers.

Edwin put his hand on her hair, and caressing it fondly, said,

"Darling, at last I have you in *our home!* How I have longed to have you here, and to say *our home*, and to know that you are mine—*mine*, body and soul and heart, and never, never more to be separated!"

"I always loved you, Edwin—and it was simply because I loved you so well that I made so many mistakes."

Edwin sighed deeply, as drawing her near to him he answered,

"No, Elvira, you are in error there. It was not love which made you act as you have

done. It was pride. And it is this pride, darling, which has been the cause of all our troubles. The unfortunate circumstances which surrounded your childhood developed this feeling, and drove you to seek redress for your wrongs in an aristocratic name. You unconsciously felt yourself fitted for a higher rank than the one you occupied. And you see, dear, your instincts were right, though the sentiment of pride was wrong. We have both been punished for our faults—for mine was as great as yours —but we are now happy, I trust and believe, for ever," he added, earnestly.

"And I think we are more worthy of it *now* than we were three years ago," she answered, gently.

"Perhaps! All things have worked well for us. Even the wickedness of those who tried to separate us could not uproot

the love that was implanted in our hearts for each other. I have a letter here," he added, taking a paper from his pocket-book, "which, if I had received at the time it was intended for me to have it, would have saved me from going to the Crimea, and given me a right to seek a reconciliation with thee, my wife." Opening the letter, he said, "Do you recognize the writing?"

"Good, noble man!" whispered Elvira, pressing the letter to her lips. "Why did I not rather listen to him, instead of my wounded, delusive self-love!"

"Will you read it?"

"No, no, I can't! Read it aloud to me," she pleaded, leaning her head against her husband's breast.

He read:—

"'DEAR FRIEND,—An inward feeling tells me this will be the last time I shall address

you on earth. My glass has had its run, and ere this is in your hands the last few grains of sand will have ebbed their course. Therefore you must believe what I now write to be dictated by my hand as my dying words. If, when I am in the grave, your wife sees this letter, tell her that I betrayed her confidence to her husband in the strong hope that by doing so, it would bring your hearts together and lead you to understand each other as only man and wife can who love, and that in dying, I may have brought to the woman *I* loved the happiness and peace I have truly wished her to possess.

" ' That morning you appeared at Timasjö, Casterton, your wife had confided to me that she really loved you. As far as I can remember, the following were her exact words (I repeat them that you may recog-

nize their truth) :—"I went to Wiesbaden," she said, "with the childish desire of making a grand and noble marriage, and of obtaining a name as illustrious as my father's is ignoble and unknown. Pride, of course, filled my soul. A week later my father told me that he had gratified my wish, and that I was to be presented that same evening to a nobleman whose wife I could be if I liked. I naturally went to the opera filled with pride and delight. I saw my husband, and then, in an instant I wished that he had been nameless and poor that I might have dared to love him. The next day he demanded my hand, and I felt already that I had begun to care for him, and that his rank might hinder my happiness. I was happy and unhappy at the same time. I promised to marry him, and my heart went with

my promise. He left the town, and I learned to know you. Your friendship was a great source of pleasure to me; for the feeling of affection for my betrothed husband was so sudden and intense, it alarmed and troubled me. I was married, and on all the earth there was no other man I would have chosen for my husband; but the moment I dared show him that I cared for his love, that same moment I learned that he could never care for me. My pride came to my aid, and I sought to free him from the burden of my presence. Never would I sue for the love which was not given freely, not if it cost me my life to be without it. I love him with all my heart, and no one else has ever been dear to me for one single moment; but I will never see him again, and I should die with shame if you, Sir Sidney, ever let him

know that I have confessed so much to you."

"'These were her words, Casterton, and I hope you will believe their thrilling truth. Poor Elvira! For your sake, she studied for the stage, in the hope that if she sang in public you would break your promise to the marchioness, and free yourself and her, and enjoy the freedom and liberty you longed for by the side of the woman, Martha, who had wrought you both so much sorrow. Elvira loves you *so well*, she prefers sacrificing herself and ruining her own position in society to give you the liberty she fancies you desire. And now, Casterton, that you know your wife loves you, will you not seek her forgiveness, and enjoy the happiness you can have by stretching out your hand for it? You are jealous of her, I know, and where jealousy exists love lurks.

That beautiful Martha is Elvira's deadliest enemy, and she has tried even to make use of my affection for your wife, which she found out by some devilish wile, to work the harm and mischief such as she rejoices in. I know Brogren's anger is of her creation; but if I fall to-morrow by his hand, I shall die in the hope that the one I loved so truly is happy at last, by the side of my best and much-loved friend.

"'Farewell, and remember me to *her* whose sweet face will be before me in death. Make her as happy as even *I* could wish to see her. Love her as earnestly as she was once loved by your true friend,

"'SIDNEY.'"

A silence followed the perusal of this letter; but Elvira's tears dropped fast and heavy over her cheeks.

"Each word of that letter is a true and faithful index of his noble character. Ah! Edwin, my husband, you have no idea how much I have him to thank for! But for him I might never have been here with you now. It was he who discovered my intention of appearing at the opera, and not only informed Mrs. Brow that she might intimate it to you—but he went to Madame M. and persuaded her to be ready for any emergency that might arise. Ah, yes, he was a faithful friend, and that deed alone saved my honour. For months I had prepared for the step—in Paris, Vienna, Rome, and even London, I had lived a brilliant life, as the rich and noble Lady Casterton, in order that my face might be well known, that all would recognize me on the stage, and that I might drive you to give me up, and seek justice at the hands of the law.

Night and day those words you had written to Martha were before my eyes, 'Take this woman from my side, and I shall be the happiest among men;' and I did everything in my power, without soiling my reputation as a *woman,* to drive you to free yourself and be happy."

"I think I must have been mad, Elvira, when I wrote those words, for I did not mean them. Even while her beauty fascinated me, I despised myself for being captivated by her. I thought you regretted the step you had taken, and that you left me *only* because my presence wearied you, and that you hated the bond which bound you to me. Darling, every day and hour I live I will try and undo the sorrow I have caused you. God helping me, you shall never again have a shade of pain to bear, if love and affection of the truest kind can ward it from you."

"I know that now," she answered, as she raised her head and looked up in his face through her tears. "But, Edwin, will you tell me why you went to the Crimea?—it puzzles me more and more each time I think of it. I know now it was not because of my birth, for that you already knew, though I had an idea that it was this painful knowledge drove you from me. Then when I found you on the battle-field, you knew me again in an instant, but you pretended not to do so; and then, when I put on the dress of a French Sister of Mercy, I determined never to let you know that I was aware you had recognized me as your wife. You can never imagine how your silence pained me! I fancied you wished that the history of my supposed death had been a true and real one, and that you would not acknowledge your wife, because she had been born in a prison."

"No, my darling, it was not that, indeed it was not," he replied, quickly. "But when I followed you to Altorp, with hot jealousy in my heart, raised there by the significant looks and words of Armida, I saw you sitting in the twilight by the side of Carl Brogren, as I thought, at least—but I now know it was Fredrik, the pastor, with whom you were conversing. Well, I stood in the shade and listened for a while, for I understand Swedish tolerably well, and I heard you say, 'I will throw myself at my husband's feet, and confess to him the disgrace I have brought upon him. Perhaps he will divorce me, but I know he will forgive me,' and then you spoke of the affection which had caused the crime, and I in my blindness judged you spoke of *yourself*, and the disgrace you had caused me. I had heard nothing of the former part of your conver-

sation, or I should have known you spoke of your mother. The effect of that speech of yours, Elvira, I shall never forget. I wandered about for hours as if demented, then as I grew cooler I reflected on the miserable existence you had led by my side, and I determined, without angry words, without scandal of any kind, without one word of accusation of reproach, to go away and leave you for ever. I knew I had no right to condemn the wife I had wronged. When I saw you again, just after I was wounded, I thought it was fear had driven you to follow me; but I preferred not telling you I knew you, till chance, or some unforeseen impulse prompted you to tell me the reason of your presence in that dangerous place. I persuaded the doctor to let you know I was blind when the inflammation in my eyes set in; and it was

not till I reached Casterton that I heard the report of Lady Casterton's supposed death. Mrs. Brow recognized you, of course, but you forbad her to make known your presence and identity, and the household generally had never seen you."

"Yes, it was I who sent that paragraph to the papers, that you might be free of the wife for whose sake you had sought and courted death."

"But instead, I found my wife more worthy of my love than even I had ever dreamed of, and God gave me back my life, that I might devote it to her and her happiness," he answered, clasping her in his strong arms, and holding her close to his heart.

And as the years sped on, these two, who began their wedded life with so much sorrow and tribulation, lived to enjoy

and appreciate the sweetness of devoted love, and to be an honour and a blessing, not only to their country but to their friends and dependents.

With their two little sons, they from time to time visited the land of the north where Elvira was born, and taught them to love and respect the faithful, generous, and self-denying Lotta, who had served during the best years of her life the child of her former mistress, and who now lived in peace and quiet at Altorp, thanking God for His goodness to her foster-child, and for the luxury by which she herself was surrounded in her old age.

L'ENVOI.

GENTLE READER,

The reference to divorce by reason of absence and voluntary separation without personal misconduct on either side, will scarcely be intelligible to you without a brief explanation of the Swedish law on the subject.

The chief grounds of dissolution of marriage are the same in Sweden as in most other European countries, except that incompatibility of temper and cruelty alone

are not deemed sufficient in themselves to untie the hymeneal knot.

The peculiar provision of the Swedish law alluded to in the history of Elvira is that regarding desertion or abandonment. If either party quits the other and leaves the country with the intention of permanent separation, the party left at home can sue for a divorce.

The judge on the establishment of the fact of flight, can order a public proclamation for the fugitive. If no return be made within a year and a day, he can pronounce an absolute decree of divorce.

The whole subject of the marriage laws of different countries is of great and surpassing interest to the happiness of countless households; but it is likewise one of exceeding intricacy and difficulty; and so curiously interwoven in the web of the

social fabric of the various nations of Europe, that profane hands cannot touch it with effect, and few even of the most eminent jurists of the age are believed to be masters of this branch of social law.

The attempts made to solve some of the difficulties of the conjugal tie in America in our own time, and in France during the brief reign of the Goddess of Reason, are not such as to encourage other nations to abandon the ancient ways without much more reflection and profound judgment than have yet been brought to bear upon the question.

The translator of Elvira may therefore plead reasonable excuse for not attempting to throw further light on the matter than is contained in the brief allusions embodied in, and transferred from, the Swedish text. May she hope, gentle reader, that this at-

tempt to make known in England another of the writers of Northern Europe will be favourably received by you.

The simple tales of Frederika Bremer and Hans Andersen received a warm welcome from our immediate predecessors. But they were put into an English dress in the pre-sensational period of novel writing and reading, when the public taste did not need the artificial stimulus of highly-seasoned narratives. As it is still with the Scandinavian people so it was then with us. Simple tastes and moral lives were the rule, and in simple stories the events of those lives and the record of those tastes were told.

Have simple tastes departed from us, and do moral lives no longer interest the daily increasing class of novel readers ?

I hope and believe not.

In this hope and belief I risk my faith, gentle reader, in the success of "Elvira, Lady Casterton."

A. W.

Bessenbach Château, Bavaria,
August 10*th*, 1874.

THE END.

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